STREET & SMITH'S

UNKNOWN

AUG. 1939
20c

THE GHOUL
by
L. Ron Hubbard

GET RID OF DANDRUFF WITH LISTERINE

Reaches and kills Pityrosporum ovale, which causes dandruff . . . scalp becomes cleaner, fresher, healthier

Don't go around with a case of dandruff that humiliates you and disgusts others. Start using Listerine Antiseptic and massage once a day at least. Twice a day is better.

This amazingly delightful treatment has proved successful in laboratory and clinic. Countless men and women use no other.

Listerine Antiseptic, famous for 25 years as a mouth wash and gargle, succeeds so brilliantly in controlling dandruff because it gives scalp, hair, and hair follicles an antiseptic bath which removes ugly flakes and kills the queer, bottle-shaped germ (Pityrosporum ovale) which causes dandruff.

Start with Listerine Antiseptic and continue the treatments regularly. Results will delight and amaze you. No other remedy that we know of has such a clinical record of success in such a large majority of cases.

Even after dandruff has disappeared, it is wise to massage with Listerine Antiseptic at regular intervals to guard against reinfection.

Lambert Pharmacal Company
St. Louis, Mo

THE TREATMENT

MEN: Douse Listerine Antiseptic on the scalp *at least once a day*. **WOMEN:** Part the hair at various places, and apply Listerine Antiseptic right along the part with a medicine dropper, to avoid wetting the hair excessively.

Always follow with vigorous and persistent massage with fingers or a good hair brush. But don't expect overnight results, because germ conditions cannot be cleared up that fast.

Genuine Listerine Antiseptic is guaranteed not to bleach the hair or affect texture.

LISTERINE ***ANTISEPTIC*** **THE *PROVED* TREATMENT FOR DANDRUFF**

A Money-Making Opportunity

for Men of Character

EXCLUSIVE FRANCHISE FOR

AN INVENTION EXPECTED TO REPLACE A MULTI-MILLION-DOLLAR INDUSTRY

Costly Work Formerly "Sent Out" by Business Men Now Done by Themselves at a Fraction of the Expense

This is a call for men everywhere to handle exclusive agency for one of the most unique business inventions of the day.

Forty years ago the horse and buggy business was supreme—today almost extinct. Twenty years ago the phonograph industry ran into many millions—today practically a relic. Only a comparatively few foresighted men saw the fortunes ahead in the automobile and the radio. Yet irresistible waves of public buying swept these men to fortune, and sent the buggy and the phonograph into the discard. So are great successes made by men able to detect the shift in public favor from one industry to another.

Now another change is taking place. An old established industry—an integral and important part of the nation's structure—in which millions of dollars change hands every year—is in thousands of cases being replaced by a truly astonishing, simple invention which does the work better—more reliably—AND AT A COST OFTEN AS LOW AS 2% OF WHAT IS ORDINARILY PAID! It has not required very long for men who have taken over the rights to this valuable invention to do a remarkable business, and show earnings which in these times are almost unheard of for the average man.

EARNINGS

One man in California earned over $1,600 per month for three months—close to $5,000 in 90 days' time. Another writes from Delaware—"Since I have been operating (just a little less than a month of actual selling) and not the full day at that, because I have been getting organized and had to spend at least half the day in the office; counting what I have sold outright and on trial, I have made just a little in excess of one thousand dollars profit for one month." A man working small city in N. Y. State made $10,805 in 9 months. Texas man nets over $300 in less than a week's time. Space does not permit mentioning here more than these few random cases. However, they are sufficient to indicate that the worthwhile future in this business is coupled with immediate earnings for the right kind of man. One man with us has already made over a thousand sales on which his earnings ran from $5 to $60 per sale and more. A great deal of this business was repeat business. Yet he had never done anything like this before coming with us. That is the kind of opportunity this business offers. The fact that this business has attracted to it such business men as former bankers, executives of businesses—men who demand only the highest type of opportunity and income—gives a fairly good picture of the kind of business this is. Our door is open, however, to the young man looking for the right field in which to make his start and develop his future.

Not a "Gadget"— Not a "Knick-Knack"—

but a valuable, proved device which has been sold successfully by business novices as well as seasoned veterans.

Make no mistake—this is no novelty—no flimsy creation which the inventor hopes to put on the market. You probably have seen nothing like it yet—perhaps never dreamed of the existence of such a device—yet it has already been used by corporations of outstanding prominence—by dealers of great corporations—by their branches—by doctors, newspapers, publishers—schools—hospitals, etc., etc., and by thousands of small business men. You don't have to convince a man that he should use an electric bulb to light his office instead of a gas lamp. Nor do you have to sell the same business man the idea that some day he may need something like this invention. The need is already there—the money is usually being spent right at that very moment—and the desirability of saving the greatest part of this expense is obvious immediately.

Some of the Savings You Can Show

You walk into an office and put down before your prospect a letter from a sales organization showing that they did work in their own office for $11 which formerly could have cost them over $200. A building supply corporation pays our man $70, whereas the bill could have been for $1,600! An automobile dealer pays our representative $15, whereas the expense could have been over $1,000. A department store has expense of $88.60, possible cost if done outside the business being well over $2,000. And so on. We could not possibly list all cases here. These are just a few of the many actual cases which we place in your hands to work with. Practically every line of business and every section of the country is represented by these field reports which hammer across dazzling, convincing money-saving opportunities which hardly any business man can fail to understand.

Profits Typical of the Young, Growing Industry

Going into this business is not like selling something offered in every grocery, drug or department store. For instance, when you take a $7.50 order, $5.83 can be your share. On $1,500 worth of business, your share can be $1,167.00. The very least you get as your part of every dollar's worth of business you do is 67 cents—on ten dollars' worth $6.70, on a hundred dollars' worth $67.00—in other words two thirds of every order you get is yours. Not only on the first order—but on repeat orders—and you have the opportunity of earning an even larger percentage.

This Business Has Nothing to Do With House to House Canvassing

Nor do you have to know anything about high-pressure selling. "Selling" is unnecessary in the ordinary sense of the word. Instead of hammering away at the customer and trying to "force" a sale, you make a dignified, business-like call, leave the installation—whatever size the customer says he will accept—at our risk, let the customer sell himself after the device is in and working. This does away with the need for pressure on the customer—it eliminates the handicap of trying to get the money before the customer has really convinced himself 100%. You simply tell what you offer, showing proof of success in that customer's particular line of business. Then leave the invention without a dollar down. It starts working at once. In a few short days, the installation should actually produce enough cash money to pay for the deal, with profits above the investment coming in at the same time. You then call back, collect your money. Nothing is so convincing as our offer to let results speak for themselves without risk to the customer! While others fail to get even a hearing, our men are making sales running into the hundreds. They have received the attention of the largest firms in the country, and sold to the smallest businesses by the thousands.

No Money Need Be Risked

in trying this business out. You can measure the possibilities and not be out a dollar. *If you are looking for a business that is not overcrowded*—a business that is just coming into its own—on the upgrade, instead of the downgrade—a business that offers the buyer relief from a burdensome, but unavoidable expense—a business that has a prospect practically in every office, store, or factory into which you can set foot—regardless of size—*that is a necessity* but does not have any price cutting to contend with as other necessities do—that because you control the sales in exclusive territory is your own business—*that pays more on some individual sales than many men make in a week and sometimes in a month's time*—if such a business looks as if it is worth investigating, *get in touch with us at once* for the rights in your territory—don't delay—because the chances are that if you do wait, someone else will have written to us in the meantime—and if it turns out that you were the better man—we'd both be sorry. So for convenience, *use the coupon below*—but send it right away—or wire if you wish. But do it now. *Address*

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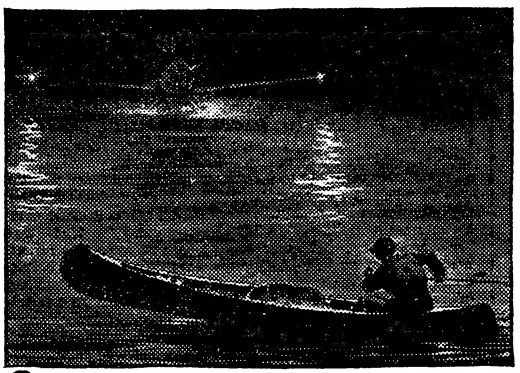
"THE HURTLING MONSTER ROARED STRAIGHT AT ME!"

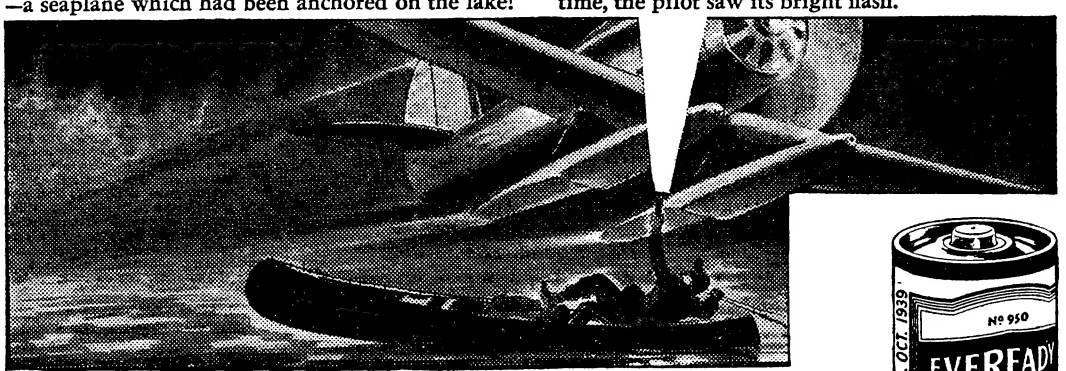
F. L. BROWNELL
Licensed Guide
Adirondack Forest Preserve

1 "One dark night," writes Mr. Brownell, "I had to cross Fourth Lake in a canoe. The utter silence gave one the feeling of being a million miles from civilization.



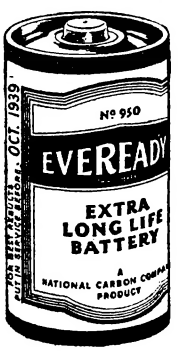
2 "About halfway across, the night was shattered by the roar of a powerful motor. Two specks of light, which rapidly grew larger, came towards me —a seaplane which had been anchored on the lake!

3 "The hurtling monster was roaring straight for me! The pilot couldn't hear my shouts. I made a frantic grab for the flashlight beside me. Just in time, the pilot saw its bright flash.



4 "The plane shot aside as it took the air, missing my canoe by what seemed like inches! I think I can truthfully say that those 'Eveready' *fresh* DATED batteries saved my life. I'll tell the world I'll never be without them in *my* flashlight. It just doesn't pay to take chances.

(Signed) F. L. Brownell"



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Illustrations by: Cartier, Isip and Kramer.

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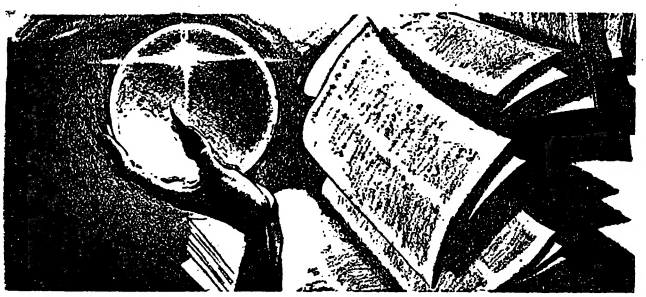


OF THINGS BEYOND

In next month's Unknown, we will present the first of the articles I suggested three months ago; Eric Frank Russell, whose magnificent "Sinister Barrier" was Unknown's first novel, has written an article discussing those remarkable and incredible things that crop up in newspapers here, there and everywhere. But these are not a collection made up of things that may have happened fifty years ago, or queer, isolated incidents over the span of a half dozen centuries. Every item Russell reports occurred in the last full year of record—1938!

The material—and Russell's conclusions, or suggestions—can best be described by the title—"Over the Border."

H. L. Gold—who presented "Trouble with Water"—and L. Sprague de Camp—who invented our knightly, slightly maladjusted friend, Sir Howard van Slyck—have collaborated in a new story: "None But Lucifer." This story is not humor. It is one of the most unusual, grimmest pieces of work Unknown has presented. It—perhaps even more than did "Sinister Barrier"—will leave you with that uncomfortable assurance that *you cannot know!* Mr. Alexander P. Johnson—pompous little businessman—will, forever after, make you wonder somewhat about your neighbor—or the man across the street.

Lester del Rey will appear again next month. He has a little tale of a sad little man, somewhat misplaced in time and space, but a very wistful, very helpful, very skilled little worker—"The Coppersmith." It will, I think, make something of a relief from the world that the long novel, "None But Lucifer," presents.

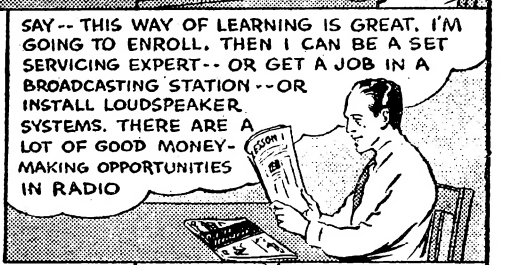
THE EDITOR.

HOW A FREE LESSON STARTED BILL ON THE WAY TO A GOOD RADIO JOB

Find out how practical it is to

Train at Home for a Good RADIO Job

I'll send a sample lesson FREE



J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute
Established 25 years

Clip the coupon and mail it. I will prove I can train you at home in your spare time to be a RADIO EXPERT. I will send you my first lesson FREE. Examine it, read it, see how easy it is to understand—how practical I make learning Radio at home. Men without Radio or electrical knowledge become Radio Experts, earn more money than ever as a result of my Training.

Why Many Radio Experts Make $30, $50, $75 a Week

Radio broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, station managers and pay well for trained men. Fixing Radio sets in spare time pays many $200 to $500 a year—full time jobs with Radio jobbers, manufacturers and dealers as much as $30, $50, $75 a week. Many Radio Experts open full or part time Radio sales and repair businesses. Radio manufacturers and jobbers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, engineers, servicemen, in good-pay jobs with opportunities for advancement. Automobile, police, aviation, commercial Radio, loud speaker systems are never fields offering good opportunities now and for the future. Television promises to open many good jobs soon. Men I trained have good jobs in these branches of Radio. Read how they got their jobs. Mail coupon.

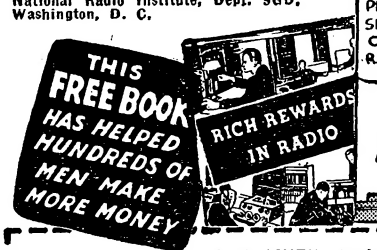
Many Make $5, $10, $15 a Week Extra in Spare Time While Learning

The day you enroll I start sending Extra Money Job Sheets; show you how to do Radio repair jobs. Throughout your training I send plans and directions that made good spare time money—$200 to $500—for hundreds, while learning. I send you special Radio equipment to conduct experiments and build circuits. This 50-50 method of training makes learning at home interesting, fascinating, practical. I ALSO GIVE YOU A MODERN, PROFESSIONAL, ALL-WAVE, ALL-PURPOSE RADIO SET SERVICING INSTRUMENT to help you make good money fixing Radios while learning and equip you for full time jobs after graduation.

Find Out What Radio Offers You

Act Today. Mail the coupon now for sample lesson and 64-page book. They're free to any fellow over 16 years old. They point out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television; tells about my training in Radio and Television; show you letters from men I trained, telling what they are doing and earning. Find out what Radio offers YOU! MAIL COUPON in an envelope, or paste on a postcard—NOW!

J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute, Dept. 9GD,
Washington, D. C.



MAIL THIS NOW

J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 9GD,
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Smith: Without obligating me, send the sample lesson and your book which tells about the opportunities in Radio and your 50-50 method of training men at home to become Radio Experts. (Please write plainly.)

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IF YOU TRIED to guess the price of Mattingly & Moore by its smooth, mellow flavor, you'd think it costs a whole lot more than it does!

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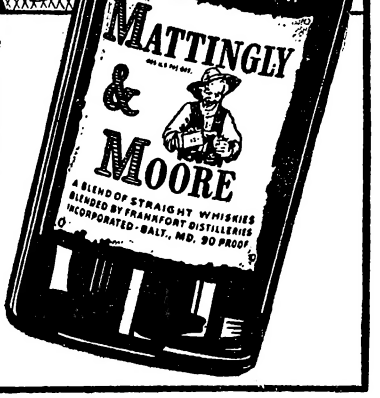

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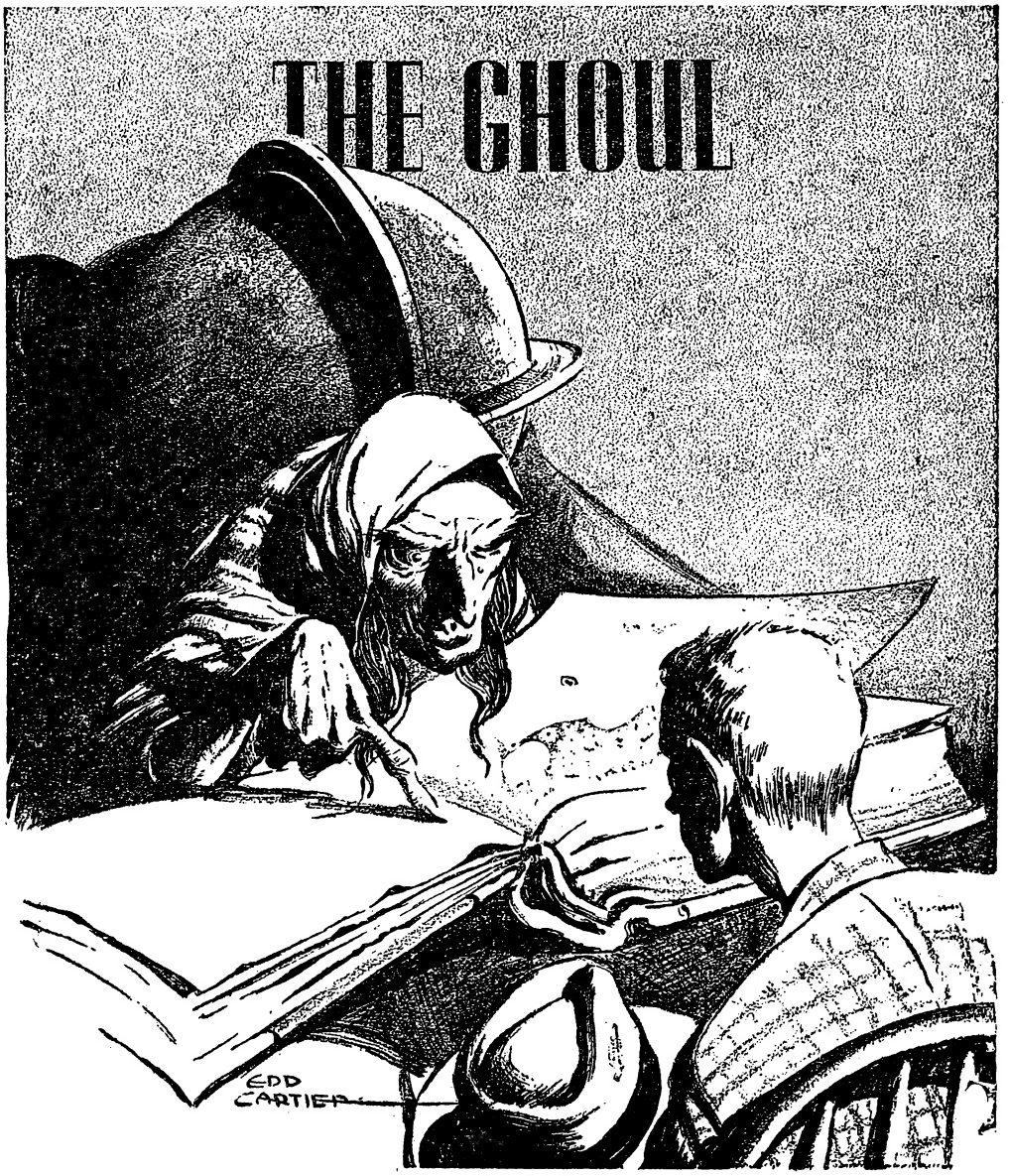

By L. RON HUBBARD

I.

IRISH worked at the Burton Hotel in N'Yawk, though it wasn't quite as bad as that. Irish was strictly a N'Yawker, having established his right to that title very early in life by being born in Ireland—for it must be remarked that N'Yawkers are never born in N'Yawk.

Up to the time when he walks into our lives, his history had been very average, though very varied. As an orphan he

had been given into the care of some Poles in the Bronx; after that he ran errands for a Hebrew gentleman who enjoyed a profit from clothings and small vestings. From errands he had graduated into the more localized and more distinguished position of hopping bells, at which trade he had first been apprenticed in a very shabby dive on Ninth Avenue. From Ninth he had graduated to Eighth. Then the Seventh and, just now, he was halfway between Seventh and Broadway just after those two avenues cease their quarrel and part to meet no more.

The Burton Hotel was a glittery place, having to do with people as polished and hard as chromium. It caught the better actors, the better yokels and the better travelers from far lands, and the only thing Irish had against the place was that it sported a few too many McGees. Now, know that a McGee is a person who seldom tips and that there are first-water McGees—who never, never tip, even after telling you that MGM has just signed them—and second-water McGees—who, with great condescension, sometimes tip a nickel—and third-water McGees—who kick through at long intervals with a dime.

But, if the pay was indifferent, there was still much to commend the Burton, for known names often stopped there—and sometimes went away leaving their baggage—and the place was in the heart of things where a man could hear the El clatter and the subway roar and all the taxi drivers blasting their horns and madly bashing up their fenders. And, in particular, the Burton offered illimitable chances for getting in trouble.

Just how Irish managed it he could not tell. Often he had been asked—sometimes, even, with the hope of an answer—just how he managed it. That he did was known very well, especially to the bell captain—who had a trick of snapping his fingers and looking down his nose and collecting five bucks at very regular intervals. The bell captain always gave Irish the people with the sourest faces and the most bags, because, after all, if Irish got into anything there was but little mutual revenue to be lost. Occasionally the assistant manager became intrigued with the problem, for it seemed almost impossible for one man to get into so many scrapes in such short intervals.

Irish, his hair standing straight up and his blue eyes very woeful, always tried to answer truthfully, such as: "Well, sir, it wasn't that I tried to do it, but, gee, how was I to know she was goin' to come boilin' out of that corridor with a open bottle o' ink in 'er hand?"

Naturally, it would be impossible for a man to know such a thing and it was actually the fault of the guest for carrying open bottles of ink and the worry of the underwriters to pay for her hundred-dollar gown. But out of twelve bellboys, why was it always Irish?

IT had been Irish who had told the G-men about the fellow in 1623 counterfeiting money all night and every night. Now, any of the twelve gentlemen on the bench might have noticed that and reported it. But they hadn't. And it was Irish who brought down six G-men on a timid little clerk who had so much to do at the office he had to bring his mimeographing home. And even after the fellow had moved away, Irish still couldn't tell just why it had to be he who had discovered it.

In short, if any error of any sort was to be made at the Burton, Irish would be the one to make it, and after he had been there a few months, it became quite fashionable, each time the rye was taken to the temperance lady in 1834, to howl for Irish. And there seemed to be no limit to the number of possibilities he could get from a comparatively few basics.

There was the improvision he accom-

plished via the wastebasket of an old sea captain who had just moved away—at least, everybody thought he was an old sea captain. It had to be Irish who found the crackly old map. Obviously it was a treasure map, even down to the "Captain Kidd" on it.

This, of course, was the cue to Irish to make his fortune, and so he had recruited partners among his fellow workers. And when the "old sea captain" returned two weeks later, having found another part with another show company, and when he remarked that this time he wouldn't have to wave treasure maps around the stage, *what* was the Irish & Co. treasure hunters to do with the deep-sea diving outfit they had bought?

Yes, it was always Irish. There was a rumor about that it was his big feet. They were very big, of course, even for an Irishman; but it is very unlikely that they had much to do with his troubles. Rather it was another portion of his anatomy. He had a nose. It was an Irish nose, turned up slightly at the end and very small and freckled and wrinkled when he laughed. Yes, it was his nose, for he thrust it into everything which came his way. And the lady in 1834 got rye because Irish wondered what she would do under the circumstances. And the episode of the corridor and ink came shortly after a door had slammed and high voices had been raised between two people lately married—it wouldn't have done to walk right down in front of their door, you see. And if Irish went out to walk a Pekingese and came back with a St. Bernard, it was often in the interests of Cupid, whom the Irish dearly love to serve.

On the face of it, he was clumsy. But what man who was clumsy could have danced the bell captain's truest love straight into his heart? And Becky—who ran the newsstand in the lobby—was certainly a judge of dancers. The immediate result, of course, was the presentation to Irish of all the McGees in the house.

On the day when we begin to examine his strange subsequent history, Irish had been discussing the ponies with Becky. Becky was from "dyown Souf" and she knew her ponies. In fact, when she had come to town to go on the stage and had drawn only thirty a week for the line and specialty plus a pair of aching gams, she had found that it interfered with her wire-office contact and so had elected to peddle papers and smokes. It was rumored that she had a system and, indeed, there were those who claimed that it consisted wholly of a wondrous pair of blue eyes. This was libel of the worst sort, for though she did flatter everyone, what girl doesn't?

THE bell captain got a gleam in his eyes to match his hair and saw two things at once: Irish by the newsstand, and a trunk of a size which would have made a Filipino an excellent home.

"Front!" cried the captain, at the same time holding little Georgie Baines upon the bench. Irish didn't turn, so the captain played the anvil chorus upon the bell. But Becky was showing Irish on the forms that it was Light Lily and not Smoky Lad who would win the third at Preakness, and the captain was finally forced to abandon his signal bridge and march straight upon his prey.

"Irish!"

Irish turned and gazed at the captain and was innocent of any wrong, though he immediately began to utter an apology. The captain, Fred Torrence, inspired that sort of thing, and Irish had the tender feelings which went with a tender, Irish heart.

"If you could spare a moment, Irish," said the captain, suddenly gentle, "I think the guest at the desk might possibly have something for you to do."

Irish nodded hastily, his hair standing straight up and flaming more than

ever, and sprinted toward the guest in question. His flight was such that he overestimated his distance and the friction between shoes and marble floor and came up with a bang against the new guest's right arm just as that gentleman had finished the laborious task of filling a card. The ink sprayed out of the pen as from a fire hose and the clerk got it on his immacualte white cuff.

The new guest spun about, and Irish, all contrite, was suddenly more frightened than he had ever been before in his life!

The man wore a white silk robe which reached down to the tops of his scarlet slippers. He was crowned by a turban at least a foot tall. And between turban and gown lay the most horrible eyes Irish had ever seen.

They were all yellow!

No pupil like a man's but a vertical black slit like a cat's!

The guest's beard shivered with wrath, and an unholy vibration came out of him and paralyzed Irish's wits completely. There are those who say that the men of Ireland are gifted with a second sight. Perhaps it is so. But it was certain that Irish felt fan upon his face a blast from the devil's hottest caldron.

It took only an instant for the guest to recover himself. The clerk started to lay out the usual flaying, but the guest cut him short. "I am sure," he hissed, "that it was but an accident. My baggage, it is there."

Irish got himself alive and sped to the baggage which the taxi driver had left on the sidewalk. Much too distrait to notice petty details, he swung a strange sack under one arm and laid hold of the handle of the trunk and ran to the freight elevator. So unnerved was he that it was not until he lifted that trunk into 1313 that he found what was so odd about it.

It didn't have any weight! Or, at least, it weighed far, far less than the usual trunk, despite its enormous size. Irish, opening the door for the new guest and then automatically checking towels and soap and lights and heat, felt the eyes going steadily after him. With alacrity he boosted the weightless trunk against the indicated wall, planted the sack on the bag stand and then charged out of the room, not remembering until he hit the hall that he had not waited for a tip. He turned around and there was the fellow directly behind him. Irish had moved fast and yet— He shivered and the coin which crossed his palm felt as cold as though it had been packed in dry ice.

HE avoided the eyes and dashed for the elevator, happy to be able to descend into warmer regions. Even then he did not give much thought to the weightless trunk. He needed company and needed it badly and so, as soon as the clerk, the assistant manager and, finally, the bell captain, had each given him up for about ten minutes apiece, he stumbled to the cigar counter and leaned thereon, very limp and running nervous fingers through his stiff red hair.

"Who was he?" Becky wanted to know.

"Who?"

"The gentleman in the turban. Gosh, I bet he's a prince, or a rajah, or something, huh? Mah goodness, I've heard that they keep bushels of diamonds around! And rubies and things, too. What did he give you?"

Irish looked and found the coin to be a quarter. There was nothing to be read from that except "In God We Trust" and so, now that he had gotten the ringing out of his ears, he tried to solve the new guest's identity.

"They drive in gold coaches with sixty white hosses and they've got a hundred and ninety wives—"

"Who?" said Irish.

"Why, rajahs, of course."

"But maybe he wasn't a rajah. If he was a rajah, then he'd have a secretary or something with him."

"That's so," said Georgie, coming over. "Besides, the rajahs we had at the Waldorf always dressed in tail coats. They never wore gowns. At the Waldorf"—Georgie was fond of letting those about him remember that he had not always worked in a theater house—"at the Waldorf they always tipped five dollars. What'd he give you?"

"Two bits," and Georgie displayed it.

Bert came over from the elevator. "I know what that guy is."

"What?"

"The clerk showed me his ticket. He's a sheik, that's what. From Tunis."

"A sheik!" cried Becky. "Oh!"

"Don't worry," Bert told her coldly. "He's probably got more wives than he c'n count. Maybe that's why he came over here, huh?"

"From Tunis," said Georgie. "They have no rajahs in Tunis. At the Waldorf—"

"Yeah," said Bert. "At the Waldorf they all come from Forty-second Street. We know!"

"Funny thing," said Irish. "You know that trunk he had? Well, that trunk looked like it ought to weigh about a hundred thousand pounds. But," he said with a great air of mystery, "it don't."

"You couldn't lift that much," said Georgie, practically. "At the Waldorf—"

"You couldn't, neither," said Bert brutally. "What about the trunk, Irish? Did it have a gold map in it?"

IRISH waited until they quieted down. "Even that'd weigh somethin'. But it don't."

"What?" said Becky. "It don't what?"

"Don't weigh anything," said Irish.

"If it had," said the bell captain, joining them, "*you* couldn't have pushed it around." He cast a black look at Becky and marched in military fashion over to the desk.

"You're kiddin'," said Bert.

"I ain't, neither," said Irish. "I guess I was the one that took it up. It didn't weigh a thing. You know, a trunk like that, empty, is hard to shove around, ain't it?"

"Sure," said Bert.

"Well, this didn't even start to weigh what an empty trunk would, and I guess, by golly, it was over eight feet long."

"Five," said Georgie. "I saw it."

"All right, five! And it was four feet—"

"Three," said Georgie.

"Four feet tall!" said Irish. "Now, if it had been empty it would have weighed a little something. But it wasn't empty, because if it had've been, it would have had weight."

"What are you getting at?" said Bert.

"Well," said Irish, "it musta had somethin' in it that weighed less than nothin', because if it had had nothin' in it, it would have weighed somethin'."

"That's impossible," said Georgie. "Nothing weighs less than nothing."

"You ever see a balloon go up?" challenged Irish.

"Well—"

"There! It's got something in it that weighs less than nothin', *I* guess."

"Well, mah goodness, Irish," said Becky, "a man wouldn't be carrying anything around like that! Aftah all, Irish, the man is from Tunis and I never heard of anybody in Tunis having balloons."

"At the Waldorf—" said Georgie, promptly.

But, as promptly, Bert said: "Wait a minute, Irish. Don't do it!"

"Do what?" said Irish with the most innocent expression in his eyes.

"Look in that trunk!"

"Why," said Irish, offended, "I never thought of such a thing."

"You did, too!" said Bert.

"Well, what if I did?"

"Irish!" said Becky. "Aftah all, a man's baggage—"

"He ain't a man," said Irish. "He's . . . well, he's—"

"He *was* a man," said Georgie. "At the Waldorf"—he got it off quickly before Bert could stop him—"we had a lot of sheiks and they always wore them skirts. They always do. All the men, I mean. The women wear pants. I guess I—"

"Shut up," said Bert. "Look, Irish, what are you drivin' at, huh?"

"Please, Irish," said Becky. "Please don't do anything awful! Just remember all the trouble it was when you said the woman in 1289 had shot her husband and she'd only dropped a light bulb."

"Yeah, and remember—" But Bert got no farther.

"You think I'm going to do something," said Irish, aggrieved. "Why, gosh, I wouldn't think of such a thing. What's it to me what a man carries around in a trunk, huh?" And so, whistling softly to himself, he wandered off to answer 1954, who had been ringing despairingly for the past ten minutes.

The trio at the desk looked at one another, and then sadly shook their heads.

II.

PERHAPS nothing dreadful would have come of the affair had there not lived in 1312—the room next to the unknown in the turban—a man much given to parties after midnight and bromos in quantity after midday. No. 1312 was bloated and oily, boastful and lying, besides being a first-water McGee, lived thoroughly up to his profession of theatrical agent.

Two nights followed the fateful day on which the unknown in the turban had entered the hotel and nothing untoward occurred to Irish beyond his usual run of small and trivial incidents such as enraging Mrs. Tonston by accidentally offering to take her down by the freight elevator and perhaps accidentally delivering Miss Vita Mars' morning mail while her husband was calling. Nobody liked the way Miss Vita Mars said, "Boy!"

But on the ill-omened evening in question, 1312, as befitted a hard-working flesh broker, decided to entertain two of his newest—and loveliest—clients. Therefore, 1312's destinated hand wrapped itself about the phone and gave the order which started everything.

"Room service? Send up a pitcher of ice water and eight bottles of seltzer. Two very important clients are here to discuss their forthcoming contracts with MGM."

Now, it irked Fred, the bell captain, to even be addressed by a McGee, and he was especially annoyed by the obvious and uncalled-for lie. And so he instantly sent for Irish.

Irish cheerfully betook himself to the bar, not even commenting to himself that 1312 was always one to save nickels by buying his own in bottles. He collected the seltzer and ice water on the tray and shot up to the thirteenth via the servants' elevator. Humming a clog, he galloped down the hall and rapped smartly upon 1312.

The flesh broker again imparted the information that his clients were on the verge of becoming very famous but imparted nothing else of any greater value. Irish was used to it and nodded brightly, and when the flesh broker had closed his door, Irish turned and marched up the hall.

He had not gone ten feet when his corpuscles were congealed by the most awesome scream he had ever heard in all his life—which is saying a great deal for a bellboy. He almost dropped his tray and stopped dead-still, waiting for the shot which was sure to follow. But the next sound was not a shot. There was a hissing swish and then a resound-

ing crack and another wail of agony.

Irish had the sound located, and his scarlet topknot wriggled straight up as he saw the fatal numbers, 1313, upon that door. A less brave—or less curious—man would have run swiftly away from there. But not Irish. He instantly perceived that this was a matter for his express investigation, and when, once again, the long whip curled and snapped, Irish was right there with his ear pressed to the air vent.

"Don't! For the sake of God, don't!" The voice was quivering with pain, but once more the whip, insatiable, brought weeping into it.

Irish scowled harshly and every ounce of his chivalric Irish blood boiled over inside him. The voice was that of a young woman, and from the timbre of it once could well judge her frailty and beauty.

"Until you've learned that I am not to be disobeyed," rasped the unknown in the turban, "you must take your punishment!"

"I won't forget!" cried the girl piteously. "Don't strike me again! Please, God, don't!"

But again there came that awful sound and the wail which followed, and Irish, then and there, would have broken down the door had not a singular thing happened.

The door swung open.

THE unknown, head swathed in turban and great cat eyes aglow, looked thoughtfully at Irish. "I do not remember having rung."

"I . . . I was comin' to check up . . . on your . . . your *heat*. The last guest we had here was always complaining about never having any, and the manager said maybe I better come up and see if you were comfortable."

"So?" said the unknown in the turban. "*There* is the radiator."

Irish sped past him, and though very reluctant to give the fellow his back, was, nevertheless, twice as anxious to get a look at the girl. But he was not at all obvious about such things, and he gave no heed to anything in the room until he had carefully gone over the heat control—which burned his fingers. Then and not until then did he turn casually in such a way as to survey the entire room.

He felt his scalp contract.

There was nothing in that room that should not be there! No radio to account for the blood-freezing sounds. No script lying about. No whip. Only the great black trunk, now with its straps undone, cast an ominous complexion on things.

"The heat," said the unknown in the turban, "is all right?"

"Heat?" gaped Irish. And then: "Oh, sure. The heat. It's O. K. But if you have any trouble with it, you just let me know, see?" And with a lighthearted step which displayed his histrionic powers he marched past the guest and out into the hall again.

He had started to move off when the voice of the unknown in the turban stopped him.

"Young man, there is a saying that 'He who looks nowhere but along his own path often lives to a great age.' It was said by a very wise man."

"Yeah?" said Irish, feeling paralyzed by those terrible eyes but passing it off very well. "Yeah, I guess that's pretty smart all right. Well, if there's anythin' wrong, you just let me know." And this time he made good his retreat, getting around the turn in the hall.

As soon as he was out of sight he heavily leaned his back against the wall and mopped at his face, immediately startled to find how he shivered. He waited there until he heard the door close, and then his resolve came back. Swiftly he stepped around the bend, heading again toward 1313. He stopped as though he had run into the door itself. The unknown in the turban was still

Irish stumbled. It was accidental, of course, but characteristic.

there, coldly appraising him. Instantly Irish straightened up and marched right past to knock loudly upon 1312.

"Whatcha want?" said the flesh broker, annoyed.

"Your change," said Irish, handing him a dime.

Far was it from 1312 to ask questions in such a case. He put the dime in his pocket without so much as a thank you

and closed the door. Triumphant, Irish marched by the turbaned unknown again and so made good his retreat.

WHEN he had again arrived in the lobby, Irish, with a very knowing air, slid over to the cigar counter and waited for Becky to finish the ritual of chiding a purchaser about how the girls in the lobby went for him.

Becky noticed Irish's look and instantly became worried. She broke off short and came closer.

"Nice weather we're having," said Irish.

"What have you been doing now!"

"Me?"

"Yes, you!"

"Why," said Irish innocently, "I just delivered some seltzer to 1312 and—"

"Quit stalling."

"Stall, why—"

"Irish!"

"Well, I did notice somethin' a little peculiar."

"I knew it," said Becky. "If you don't stop doing these things, you'll get fired."

"I should say so," said Georgie, coming up with dignity. "At the Waldorf he would have been discharged long ago—that is, if he had ever been able to get work at the Waldorf in the first place."

"Shut up," said Becky. "Come on, Irish. Give."

"Well, it isn't so much," said Irish.

"He wants to be coaxed," said Bert, very much attracted by Irish's saintly air and expected the worst. "What's up?"

"Well," said Irish slowly, inspecting his fingernails, "the gent in Room 1313 and me *did* have a little conversation."

"You mean the sheik?" cried Becky.

"Yes, that's the man."

"Well, come on, come on," said Bert. "What about the sheik? Did he start a harem or something?"

"Bert!" said Becky.

"Awright, but these sheiks—"

"You might call it that," said Irish, polishing a button with his cuff.

"Really?" cried Becky. "A harem? In this hotel? Oboyoboy! See, Bert, I told you so! Those gentlemen go a-ridin' around on white chargers makin' off with every pore gal they meet. How'd you find out?"

"It wasn't exactly a harem," said Irish. "It was the woman he was beat-it."

"Beating?" said Becky. "Oooooh!"

"Geez," said Bert.

"At the Waldorf," said Georgie, "such a thing would—"

"Shut up," said Bert. "How'd you find out about it?"

"Well, I was just moseyin' past his door when all of a sudden I heard his whip pop and the lady yell out, beggin' him to stop. So I stopped and, sure enough, I could hear 'em plain as day, she a-weepin' and him a-beatin', and then, *bang,* he opens the door and there I am!"

"Gosh!" said Becky.

"Geez," said Bert.

"At the Waldorf," said Georgie, "such—"

"So I says I'm there to test his radiator, and he says come on in and then—"

"Yes?" said Becky.

"Then I turns around and the room" —he paused dramatically—"and the room was empty!"

"What?" said Bert.

"Empty as a beer bottle in an alley."

"But how—" said Becky.

"Humph," said Georgie. "The man is plainly a ventriloquist and our inquisitive friend here merely—"

"Shut up," said Bert. "But where could he have put her so quick?"

"THAT'S just it," said Irish, growing suddenly heated. "That big trunk he's got is where he keeps her! He musta throwed his whip in on top of

her and slammed down the lid when he came to the door."

"The man is plainly—" began Georgie.

"Keeps her in a box?" said Becky. "Oooooh!"

"Brrrr," said Bert. "But say, wait! How'd he know you was at the door?"

"Search me," said Irish.

"That's the first time you've evah been caught at a door," said Becky, impressed by the sheik's prowess.

"But didn't you hear her a-moanin' in the trunk?" prompted Bert.

"No," said Irish truthfully. "I didn't. And that's what's so funny about it, see? The trunk doesn't weigh nothin' when it's brought in, but it's got a woman inside of it just the same—"

"She could have walked in after he came," said Georgie with a lofty air. "A great many women pass in and out of those elevators and no questions asked."

"Y-e-s," said Irish doubtfully. "But! That doesn't make it any less bad. Maybe he stole her and took her up to his room, huh? Maybe she's a heiress that he kidnaped."

"It would have been in the papers," sniffed Georgie.

"It doesn't matter whether she's an heiress or not!" said Becky hotly. "The point is, some poor woman is up in that room, trapped in a trunk and getting beaten. The next time he comes out—Say, that's right. Have any of you-all seen him come out?"

They thought for a moment.

"Not me," said Bert.

"Not me," said Becky.

"Me neither," said Irish, feeling kind of cold about it.

"We're not always on duty," said Georgie with a lift of his upper lip.

Bert gave him a black look and sped off. The shifts were stacked in such a way between clerks and boys and all that he was able to come back in ten minutes with great news.

"The gent in the turban," said Bert, "ain't shoved his head out of his room for two days!"

"Gosh," said Becky. "But how's he ever get anything to eat?"

Bert sped off again and was seen to shuffle through a call book. He came back. "He hasn't had any room service in two days. Not once since he's been here! No. 1313 shows a blank all the way down!"

A chill went through all of them, even Georgie.

"M-m-maybe you better call the cops," said Becky.

"No, no!" said Bert, hurriedly, recalling the "counterfeiter." "If she's been there two days, she can stand it until we can find some other way to do something about it. But the question is, how—"

Irish looked mysterious. He cocked his head on one side, taking in the clock and Fred at the same time, and then whispered to those about him: "You just leave this thing to me."

"Oh, God!" said Bert.

"I'm the one that heard her, didn't I? Well!" And Irish made his way past the bell captain and down into the bowels of the hotel.

While he changed into street clothes and hung his uniform in the locker, he pondered the problem. But Irish was never long to suffer from lack of solution. By the time he had again reached the lobby he had a knowing wink ready for Becky and Bert and sailed by them and out into the midnight blare.

His process of reasoning was that of all great thinkers. He divided his problem into its essentials. Here he was up against a man who evidently did not eat. Therefore, there was something supernatural about that man. Anything having to do with the supernatural required a person versed in that lore.

Half an hour later he stood on the littered pavement of First Avenue, gaz-

ing at a sign which read "Madame Mystic, World-renowned Spiritualist."

Irish went in.

III.

MADAME MYSTIC was a hard woman to convince. It was not to be doubted that she did indeed have world renown, for it would have been impossible for one mere continent to have supplied the grime which plentifully bedecked her. And because of such wide learning and experience, it stood to reason that a handsome young gentleman who chose midnight for his call had just had a spat with his loved one and came seeking solace from the spirit world.

Her scrawny hands twitched at the thought of a fee and her hard, ill-treated face took on its best professional sadness, even though the lips strove to grin in satisfaction.

"Ah, yes. Ah, yes," she intoned. "You have come for advice from the land into which even the greatest of all must some day pass. But have no dread, for I alone am empowered to guide you into a happy and wholesome solution of all your troubles."

All the while she was leading him into a blue-lighted room which smelled of cabbage cooked these thirty years, and seating him in a chair which complained bitterly of its rheumatism as it took his weight.

Madame Mystic squatted across a round table and, to get her hand in, put her fingers upon it, rolled her eyes back into her head and lifted the table clear of the floor without other visible contact.

Irish's red hair stood up and tingled. "Wait! Look, I mean don't! I—"

"But you *do* come for advice?" she said, her heart sinking at the thought that he might be a bill collector in some new devilish guise. Almost harshly, she snapped, "Do you want yer fortune read or don't yer?"

"No, I—"

She sprang up. "Well! So yer think yer can sneak up on a pore lone woman and get her last dollar, do yer? Well, you can tell yer swells that they can have their blasted tenements and—"

"Whoa!" said Irish. "Back up! I—" And then, being, after all, a N'Yawker, he swiftly sized the situation up and planked a dollar bill upon the board. When she snatched at it he covered it with his hand, and she recollected herself enough to restore her professional smile and sit down once more.

"Look," said Irish. "I got to have some information. I suppose you're plenty smart when it comes to knowin' about things that ain't real, see? So I seen your sign and I come in. The buck's yours if I get what I come after."

"Of course, my dear boy. Anything which I can do any everything I know is at your disposal. However, my counseling fee, in such special cases—"

Irish added four bits to the buck and still held it down with his spread hand. "O. K.?"

"Yes."

"All right," he said with a sigh. "Now!" And, as briefly as he could, he related all he knew about the man in the turban.

AT FIRST the old harridan was placidly and politely and financially interested. But before Irish had gotten halfway through she was regarding him with wonder, and when he had finished she was on the edge of her rickety chair and her claw fingers were tangled in the dirty cloth on the table.

Irish was triumphant at her attitude. "So, there you have it, see? And I want to know the score."

Her expression was intense. "Describe him again."

"Well, he had on a turban and a white silk—"

"No, the eyes, man! *The eyes!*"

"Well, they sort of made chills go

through you like, and you felt kind of paralyzed when he looked at you."

"And?"

"Well, they was yellow, see? And . . . well—"

"Think! What kind of pupils did they have?"

He was stirred up and even alarmed by her tone and excitement. "Pupils? Well . . . gee— Oh, sure! That's what made his eyes look so funny. The pupils was straight up and down like a cat's and not round like a human's, and when the light hit them they spread out kind of and come in quicklike."

She heaved a sigh of satisfaction and leaned back, regarding him. "And so, young friend, you'd put yourself up against something like that. Take my advice and forget about it."

"If that's all the advice—"

"Heed what I say!" she cried, springing forward again. "You're risking your life even by looking at him!"

"What?"

"Ah, yes, I thought you'd get my point."

"Look," said Irish, "that don't go, see? Either you crack wise about what this gent is, or else."

"My young friend, for the sake of a dollar and a half I would let you talk to Julius Cæsar, Napoleon and George Washington and let you make love to the Queen of Sheba, all in one night. But for a dollar and half I won't go around with the blood of a red-haired young man upon my conscience. And that, coming from Lulu Barnes, is a pipeful. Listen. This stuff may be the bunk, see? And I may get away with a lot of things with it. But I'm giving it to you straight when I tell you that, so far as this business is known, I know it. I know it like you know the size of your collar. I studied with Hindus and God knows what else. I know all a gypsy knows and then some.

"There was a time, when I had the figure and the face, that I packed them in, and a gal can't do that unless she's got something besides scenery. Balfo and Thompson, Houdini and Carlyle, they might have had their stuff down cold, but when it came to knowing the supernatural, they took off their hats to me. In public, sonny. In public. And if it hadn't been for drink and a rotter of a man—well, to hell with that. I'm giving it to you straight. Now take your dollar and a half, and the next time your 'sheik' looks in your direction, run like hell and let the ignorant yap about bravery."

"Loo," said Irish, "I'm not doubting you. But if you don't tell me more than that, why, geez, I'm liable to walk up and find out for myself and *then* you *would* have my blood on your hands."

She looked intently at him and then laughed aloud. "You're Irish."

"That's my name, the only one I've got, and it's a good one. And that's my blood and I'm proud of it."

"Well! You needn't get huffy about it. Son—and I might have had a boy as old as you—if he hadn't died—" She stopped and regarded Irish for a long time. Finally she leaned toward him and beckoned him closer. "I'm going to tell you about this. But you must promise me never to tell a living soul that I *did* tell you."

"I promise."

"VERY well." She got up and reached into a dusty shelf to bring out a thick volume from which she blew a cloud of dust. Coughing, she sat down again and opened the book upon the table, running through the pages, but carefully lest she crack their yellowed knowledge. "There was a time when I could quote almost all such things from memory. But now such things are disused and, besides, you'll believe me the better if I show you in print. Then maybe you won't think it's just your filthy money, eh? Yes, there was a time when I knew necromancy and py-

romancy and hydromancy and such, but the old brain fails, boy. It fails. Never let yourself grow old without putting aside something against the time your brain will fail. Well! Here we are. This book has most of demonology in it, you know, and— G . . . Gh . . . Gho— Ah! Ghoul! Or Ghole. 'An Oriental demon.' Now, read that!

" 'Ghoul: An Oriental demon, capable of changing shape at will and so presenting a bewildering array of forms. This practice facilitates the waylaying of their quarry. They feed exclusively on human flesh, but can, at times, go for weeks and months without eating—' Ah, now! 'The one constant characteristic of the ghoul is his eye, which is not unlike that of a leopard, having an oblong pupil which opens and shuts horizontally. Their eyes have the peculiar characteristic of overpowering their victims, much as do several varieties of snakes. While generally found in ruins and along infrequently traveled roads from which they take their victims, ghouls are not indigenous to any locale or clime—'

"Now, boy, what about it? You have it here on the authority of Norstadt's 'Demonology.' Are you still willing to take your chances with such a hell-born being? What you heard might well have been a trap, set expressly for you, and his opening the door would tend to strengthen that theory—"

"Geez," shuddered Irish. "But the woman *was* screaming and—"

"The less a man has to do with a woman, the better, son. I'm a woman and I ought to know. Even if she is real, there's no sense in your throwing away your life on such a silly thing. Youth is romantic. It is very sad, but romance and this world are not bedmates. I'd advise that you leave your job there and get another. That wouldn't be hard to do."

"And run away?" said Irish.

"Why not? After all's said and done, boy, Remorse is easier to live with than Death. To be sure, cut and run and forget about it."

"Hey, wait a minute. You didn't finish."

She snatched the book away from him too late, for he frowned at her and quoted what he had chanced to read. " 'The herd common meadow rue is ef—' It says a herb is a good defense against them as it is against jinn, whatever *they* are. How about that? Where can I get some of that 'common meadow rue'? Why, geez, I could look the old devil straight in the eye and tell him to go chase himself. Yessir!"

She sighed deeply. "It does not say that it is a *perfect* defense. It only says a *good* defense. There's a difference."

"Aw, what's the odds? If it worked once it'll work again. Where can I get some?"

"Son—"

"Geez, haven't I got to see what's in that trunk?"

She gave a start. "You mean you'd go through with it?"

"Well, I can wait until he goes out, can't I? And then I can take some of this rue along in case he shows up when I don't expect him. I'm safe both ways, aint I? Come on, where can I get some?"

She shook her head. "A fool there was— But I suppose you'd try it even so. All right, my fine friend, there's a shop not a block from here that will be open in the morning, and he'll sell you some common meadow rue. And I'll go early and make sure it *is* common meadow rue. Now! I've done all I can. Good night."

He started to walk away but she picked up his money and pushed it at him.

He looked at her and then at the money.

She shook her head. "None of your blood on my conscience."

And, indeed, she'd have nothing to do

with it, so that Irish was forced to put it back into his pocket and go away so burdened.

But, in prospect of what was before him, he had forgotten about it less than a block away.

"Common meadow rue," he kept repeating to himself. "Common meadow rue."

IV.

BRIGHT and eager the next morning, Irish fled his rooming house and sped blithely to his doom.

True to her word, Madame Mystic —or Lulu Barnes, as the case might be —had prepared the way, and the dried and rattly little gentleman in the herb shop took one look at Irish's flaming mop and, patting a package on the counter with his left, stretched out an eager right, palm upward.

"Vor dollars," said the keeper without preamble.

"Huh?" said Irish.

"Dis iss not ordinary gommon beadow rue. She gomes high."

"Hey, but that's what I want. Just plain, ordinary common meadow rue," said Irish, his fighting blood rising.

"Vell, dot's vot dis iss. You vant, you bay."

"Two bucks," said Irish.

"Vot? Vy, you robber. Vould you durn an old ban out of his homeb? Dis, I'll hab you know, iss nod only gommon meadow rue, it iss Thelictrum Dipterocarpum of the vambly graveolens." He sneezed violently, and it was either the sneeze or the name but Irish gave him a nervous stare. The old man saw that he had gained his point in part and he undid the package with an aggrieved air.

Irish was bidden to examine a plant of a sick blue-green color, its leaves all spotted and giving it thereby a mysterious appearance. Two greenish-yellow flowers were withered on their stocks and gave the whole a decidedly unhealthy air.

Again the old man sneezed, but it inconvenienced him not at all, for in the same instant he thrust the plant under Irish's nose and ordered, "You smell itd!" Irish took a suspicious whiff of it and found that it was very strong and pungent. "Dow," cried the old man, "you daste itd!" Irish would have objected, but a leaf had been forced in between his teeth and his mouth tightened up at the bitter flavor of it.

"Sssso! Dow baybe you don't dink dat dis iss gommon meadow rue, huh? Dow baybe you got ideas dot dis iss notd Thelictrum Dipterocarpum, huh? O. K.! Vor dollars!"

Irish, without even pondering the fact that curiosity often comes very high, laid four one-dollar bills on the counter. Instead, he asked himself what Fred, the bell captain, would do that night in the locker room. But maybe, today, they wouldn't be all McGees.

The old man sneezed twice while he counted the bills twice, almost blowing them out of his hands. Now that Irish had the rue he felt very benevolent. "You ought to do something for that cold."

"Id iss notd a gold! It'ss 'ay feber!" He sneezed once more. "I'b 'ad 'ay feber vor fibty years butd business iss business. Ady dime you vantd herbs you gome do be, yah?"

"Sure," said Irish, "you bet." And with his heart all bursting with knight-errantry, he dashed for the hotel, well knowing that he was already half an hour late for work.

After divers narrow squeaks with taxis, he careened into the hotel, and his luck was so good so far that day that he only knocked a package out of an exiting actor's hand.

He sailed past Becky and dived into the depths of the locker room, where he shifted to his uniform. He had some difficulty crowding the rue against his

breast, for his jacket fitted him very snugly. Looking like a cross between a pouter pigeon and a drum major—or maybe just a drum major—he magically appeared on the twiddle seat with an air of one who had been there for hours and hours and was intensely bored thereby.

FRED had been pacing nervously in circles. He had not seen Irish come in, and after a little he strode to the bench and opened his mouth to inform Georgie that this was the last straw, that Irish—

"You mean me?" said Irish with a yawn.

"How . . . how did you get there?"

"Why, I walked, I guess. Don't tell me they're going to furnish us with pogo sticks, or airplanes, or something?"

"Listen," said Fred. "Enough is strictly enough. You were late!"

"Me? Why, I've been moving trunks for 1672 for the last half-hour," said Irish.

"That's right," said Bert, who had just stepped out of his cell with a grand slam of the brass gate. "I took him up myself."

Fred glared from one to the other, and the two other boys on the bench were hard put to keep their faces straight. Fred, seeing that his dignity was beginning to suffer, stalked off.

"You'll get fired if you don't look out," said Bert.

"So what?" said Irish.

"So you won't eat, that's what. I met Billy Smithers last night, and you know how good *he* is. Well, Billy Smithers has worn out four pairs of shoes looking for a job, and he ain't found even a ghost of one in the whole town. Not even on Ninth Avenue. I'm tellin' you, Irish, you're flirtin' with starvation."

Irish was made a little uncomfortable. If Billy Smithers was out of work, then the business must be very bad indeed. He moved uneasily and his chest crackled.

"What's the matter with you?" said Georgie. "You look all swelled up."

"Mustard plaster," said Irish. "Got ingrown eyebrows."

"Humph," said Georgie, "you wouldn't wear a mustord plaster for that! It makes your uniform look funny. At the Waldorf a boy that didn't—"

But Irish had strolled away to stop quite accidentally beside the cigar counter.

"You better watch yourself," said Becky. "Fred's dyin' for an excuse to can you."

"Could I depend on that?"

"What?"

"His dyin' if he didn't get no excuse."

"You feel pretty gay for so early in the mahnin'. Are you into something again? If it's that sheik, don't you do it. I laid awake all night long just shudderin' at the thought of him stickin' a knife into you."

"You was *that* worried?"

"I'd hate to see anybody hurt. What's wrong with your chest?"

"Why—" He stopped and stood very still, not breathing nor daring to believe his eyes.

For the first time since he had arrived, the unknown in the turban walked out of the elevator. He surveyed the lobby as though seeking to burn it up to the last chair and derive much pleasure therefrom. He saw Irish, and even though they were thirty feet apart, Irish could feel his joints go stiff. Then, feeling he had stared long enough to kill an ordinary man, the unknown in the turban turned and shuffled out into the street, where he stood for a minute or two, the wind hauling at his white gown.

WHEN he had gone, Irish became animated. "Geez, did you see that? Luck! Boy, have I got tons of it!

He's out of his room!"

"Irish! You wouldn't—"

"Oh, wouldn't I, though!"

"But he may come back! He might find you there! Please, please, Irish. Don't do it!"

But Irish was deaf. He went over to the desk and, noting Fred's absence, engaged himself in a loud conversation on the service phone.

"Oh, so you're locked out, are you?" He shook his head sadly. "But, lady, you hadn't ought to be out of your room in your kimono. . . . All right, all right. Coming right up. No. 1312 does it."

He trotted to the key desk. "Lady in 1312 and she's locked out. Gimme the pass for the thirteenth floor."

The clerk looked very knowing. "No. 1312, huh? Ha-ha, that's good."

"And in her kimono," said Irish.

"Ha-ha-ha! In her kimono. Tell her she ought to be more careful." He found the key and jangled it on its big brass ring, too interested in the situation to think of looking in 1312's box for the extra room key which would fit only 1312. "Here you go. Give her my love, Irish."

Irish trotted to the elevators and stepped into Bert's, which was down. "Lady locked out of 1312," said Irish, jangling the thirteenth-floor passkey.

Bert's scalp moved back an inch. He slammed the grate and outer door with one fast motion, and as soon as they were alone, he gasped: "Irish, you fool! Don't do it, I tell you!"

"Do what?" said Irish. "Come on, the lady is waiting."

"Don't lie to me, Irish. No. 1313 just went out and now you— Geez! What if he comes back?"

"If he does," said Irish, "you'll have trouble with your airplane."

"But, geez, there's three more! I took him down, but it ain't but one out of four that I'll take him up again. Geez, if you get caught, what'll he do to you? And what'll Fred do?"

"You let me worry about that."

They stopped at the thirteenth, and Bert leaned so far out of the cage, watching Irish out of sight, that he almost sprained his spine. He waited there as long as he could and then his indicator got too full of red and green lights and he had to depart—and his elevator wasn't all that was sinking.

Irish marched unconcernedly up to the door of 1313. He gave a glance over his shoulder and then quickly inserted his pass and stepped into the room. He closed the door behind him and stood there for a moment, breathing hard and listening harder. It seemed to him that he could hear slippers hissing up the carpet outside.

He pulled himself together, though it came over him now that this was no ordinary proceeding. He had entered the domain of one who would not take the small revenge of having him fired, but— He shuddered and dropped down before the huge trunk to tug at the lock.

It seemed to him that he heard voices, but he could not be sure. He was too busy listening for slippers on a carpet.

The lock was securely fastened, and though he unbuckled the straps and pried at the hasp, he could not move the lid. Each time he pried at it, he raised the whole weightless trunk.

ON THE chance that there might be a key hidden in the room he made a swift search, looking even on top of the closet shelf. While so engaged he became acutely aware of the rue which was sticking him unmercifully. And while its possible safeguard was a balm, he was not sure but what it would poison him. Though he didn't know what he would do with it if the ghoul came back, he got it out and clutched it firmly.

His search wholly fruitless, he came back to the hasp. He was sweating furiously now, and his ears picked up every sound and remade it into slippers on a carpet. Every rattle in New

"Drink it, lad, it'll revive you," snapped the voice in annoyance. Irish felt that merely holding the glass so it didn't float might help more.

York was the turning of a doorknob.

He bethought himself that here he had to use his head and work fast. He had gone too far to turn back. And so he took up the paper scrap which covered the inside bottom of the wastebasket and, true to his expectations, located a bobby pin which had lodged there. With this weapon he attacked the lock.

It was an ancient affair, with no more than two pins to move, and before long he had shoved them both to one side. His hand trembled. Upon his lips there formed a magnificent speech which would go something on the order of: "Unfortunate lady, I have come through great perils to deliver you from the foul beast who has imprisoned you—" But his imagination got no farther than that. Up came the lid.

Whatever he had expected there, from a lion to a fairy princess, he was not at all prepared for the actual content.

"Empty!" he gasped. All this planning and stealth to open an empty trunk! He felt bitter and his heart soured within him. No maiden in distress, no lady in chains, but only air from top to bottom, from side to side, from front to back! Air, nothing but air!

A faint buzzing came into his ears and he thought that it was from shock. But the next moment he found out what shock is.

"Ah! A bellboy!"

"It's a man!"

"Oh! Oh! Oh! A bellboy!"

"Honorable sir—quiet, the rest of you!—honorable sir, we beg to tell you of our gratitude, in this the lowest ebb of our existence. Long have we—"

"Hey, pal, this is no time to be makin' a speech!"

"Let's get out of here!"

"Come on, bellboy!"

"Oh! Hurry! What if he comes back?"

Poor Irish sat in the middle of the floor where he had slumped and gazed at the emptiness about him in complete bewilderment. Not a thing could he see and yet—yet here were people talking all around him with not a person to be seen! The voice of a maiden, that of an elderly, very worried woman. Deep, oratorial tones. A nasal Bronx grating.

"W-h-h-h-oo . . . wh-what . . . *gulp!*"

"We've frightened him," said the elderly woman in quick sympathy. "But please, please, please, young man, take us out of here immediately!"

"You said it! Snap into it!"

THE EMPTY room swam before Irish's eyes. He had a feeling that the rue had poisoned him, after all, and that now he was in the last delirium of death. Hurriedly he cast the herbs from him and leaped to his feet, racing to the door. He threw it wide and would have slammed it, but it flew instantly the other way and the buzzing about him increased.

"We're out!" cried the girl's voice. "Oh, Tommy, dear, we're out at last!"

"We won't be for long if we stay around here," said a young man right at Irish's elbow.

Irish leaped sideways and heard a grunt in his left ear. He sprang away from that.

"Keep offa me toes, can'tcha?"

Irish swallowed hard. "Y-yes. I . . . I'm s-s-sorry!"

"He's excited, poor lad."

"Come, honorable sir. Lead off and quickly. We have no reason nor any time to tarry here. As my comrade, Machine-gun Frezoni, has aptly suggested, we must snap into it. At any moment that miscreant, Mohammed Ali, may return, and if, young sir, you have had any experience at all with ghouls, you must appreciate that Mohammed Ali is undoubtedly the vilest—"

"That ain't gettin' goin'," said the

empty air which was Machine-gun Frezoni. "Can it, pop, and let the kid lead away."

Irish managed to croak, "B-bu-but M-Machine-gun Frezoni is . . . is dead!"

"Yeah, but that ain't sayin' what I'm gonna do to the dirty rats that done it. Come on!"

Irish steadied himself against the wall, putting his back to it in the time-honored attitude of a soldier about to make his last stand. "W-who are you?"

"Oh, please, please, please," said the elderly woman's voice. "What a time for chitter-chatter! Is it not enough that we are here? And that something has broken the barrier and a human being can hear us? My poor boy, I can see that your teeth are chattering, but please don't make us stand here."

Irish got his wits assembled enough to run on one cylinder, and he shut the door and gripped the passkey and then fled toward the elevators. As he heard nothing he began to breathe once more, thinking that he had outdistanced them. It was his purpose to grab an elevator and get away at all costs, and when he reached the doors without further incident, his hopes soared.

"Oh, Tommy, my poor dear," sighed the girl. "Can it be true that you and I can once again be alone?"

"There, there," said the somewhat youngish voice which was Tommy's. "Don't cry, sweetheart. You know I love you."

Irish was looking wildly about, but all he saw was the bench, the elevator buttons and the cylinder of sand topped by decayed snipes. In a frenzy he shoved the buzzer clear down and held it there.

"Geez," said Machine-gun, "what soivice! The on'y time in me life dat I didn't want none was right after we chivvied Babe the Boozer. And here he was layin' like this, see? And here we was, ready to run fer it. And wham! —open goes th' elevator door and it was all full of D. A. R.'s. Geez, was we *embarrassed!*"

"In Lunnon, a gentleman is never forced to wait. If I were theah, I should write to the *Times!* The idea of standing heah like common cattle. I have nevah liked Ameddicah if only foah its pooah lift service. Push the bell again, boy."

"Here, lemme do it," said Machine-gun harshly. And before Irish's astounded gaze, the button depressed itself savagely.

"Oh, dear, dear, why can't they hurry!"

PANIC got the better of Irish. He could hear the cage coming up the shaft, but suddenly he wanted anything but an elevator. What if Bert should hear the air talking around him? How would he ever be able to explain it to Fred? And— He reasoned no farther but bolted for the empty he had carried the bags from the night before. He let himself in just as he heard the click and hiss which told of the cage's stopping. He had difficulty again in slamming the door, but he finally got it shut and sank down on the bed, swabbing at his hot face with his palm. He heard the door of the shaft open, and then, after some time, he heard it close once more.

Terror was giving him the shakes, for he recollected at this late moment that the ghoul must inevitably return and find that his trunk had been opened —and Irish had not even locked it up again. Having had two encounters with the turbaned demon, he doubted not that the ghoul would instantly trace his loss straight to a bellhop named Irish.

"I say, old man, if you don't mind, aren't we going down in the lift, what? Deucedleh uncomfortable stayin' on the same floah with His Nibs, you know. Cawn't say as I fawncy it."

"Leave him alone," said the elderly

woman's voice crossly. "We've already frightened the poor child quite out of his wits. Now be quiet and let him rest."

"Well spoken, Martha," said the heavy voice. "We are far too deeply indebted to this intrepid youth to agitate him needlessly. Honorable sir, to whom I owe a greater debt than I can ever repay, allow me to introduce myself. I am Senator Brallston, late but ferocious foe of the regime now in power but friend of the workingman, once and forever!"

Irish stared to the right and then to the left, and still he saw no outstretched hand, though reason told him it was there. No. Here were two pillows, the bed, the bureau, the bag stand, a rocking chair, a writing desk, four pallid pictures, but—but no Senator Brallston! Nothing but the air!

It was too much. With a shudder he hid his face in his fingers and bent almost to his knees, wanting to cry, scream, shriek or laugh.

Something cold touched his hand and he almost left his uniform under him. Each separate flaming hair stood upright, and his eyes grew to the size of teapots.

A glass of water, gently moving, stood on the level of his face, but without any visible support! And an instant later something kindly put his hair back in place.

"Drink this, poor thing," said the voice the senator had called Martha.

Irish didn't want to, but he surrendered. He drank it and, surprisingly, he felt much better.

"Dat's it, pal, buck up. De woist is yet to come, as de boys useter say down t' d' frankfoiter factory. Geez, fer a minute there, y' looked like a ghost." Machine-gun laughed quite heartily. There came the sound of a slap, and the senator coughed with some annoyance.

"Why," said Martha in astonishment, "where are Grace and Tommy?" The door swung open as though blown by a draft, and a moment later Martha's voice came from the hall. "You silly children! Come in here this very instant! Don't you realize that *he* might step out of that elevator?"

THE DOOR closed again, and Irish gave a start as a hand, where there was no hand, soothingly stroked his shoulder. It was Martha. "There, there, don't leap so. You mustn't mind Tommy and Grace. You see, they were on their honeymoon when *it* happened. Their car went over an embankment and into a river, and of course"—sigh—"it killed them."

"It was *him* that did it," said Tommy spitefully. "He leaped out right in front of us, and I had to turn to miss him."

"You should have turned toward the bank," said Grace. "You had lots of room on that side."

"Oh, did I now? I'd like to know when I had time to see that!" said Tommy. "It happened so fast I scarcely saw *him* at all."

"I told you not to keep your arm around me," said Grace resentfully. "It was that that did it. If you'd only listened to me, think of what you would have saved us!"

"Listened to *you!*" cried Tommy's voice irately. "Why—"

"Cut it, pal," said Machine-gun. "The lady is all stirred up what with this 'n' that. You never got no beatin's like she did. And if you was smart, you'd know not ever to argue wit' no twist and twirl, which same don't pay."

"Listen, you cheap crook," snarled Tommy. "You call Grace a twist, or whatever you said, again and I'll smash you one."

"Oh, *Tommy!*" sighed Grace.

"See?" said Machine-gun. "It woiked like a charm. Wit' your gab an' my think piece, we'd own d' country, hey?"

"Ha-ha," said the senator hollowly.

"Are you feeling better now?" said Martha.

Irish cautiously opened his eyes. But no, there wasn't anybody there. Only the pillows and the bureau and the chairs and the lamp and the pictures and the bed—no, nobody but himself.

"What," he cried in abrupt defiance, "is this all about?"

"Why, my deah fellow, don't excite yourself. Bad for the nerves, what? You rescued us, y' know. Frightful place and dreadful bore and all that and dev'lish white of you, even though you are an Ameddican. Might I introduce myself? I am Monty Suf'n'm-B'ng'ah of Lunnon. Might I have the pleasure of your name?"

"Me?" Irish blinked at the sound of the voice and felt very silly, saying, "Why, I'm Irish."

"Oh, quite. Obvious, you know. But your name, might I awsk?"

"That's it," he said irritably.

"Peculiah pe'ple, Ameddicans. Oh, well, might as well get on with it." There was the sound of a bored yawn and then: "Oh, go ahead, senatah."

"Why, yes, to be sure," said the senator. "But I think I already introduced myself. Senator Brallston, friend of the workingman. Very pleased to meet you, Irish. I might go so far as to say that you are the most welcome sight I have seen since my first circus parade when I was but a boy. There beside you is Martha Dodson, a spinster lady who had excellent means and led a most exemplary life until she died—choking, wasn't it, Martha?"

"Cheese it," said Machine-gun. "I guess anybody'd choke wit' *his* mitts around their neck, huh, Martha?"

"Don't . . . don't let's talk about it," she shuddered.

"Grace and Thomas Morton—" The senator coughed politely but got no response. "Anyway, honorable sir, they are standing over there by the bureau and in no condition to be disturbed. I don't doubt but what you are wondering how it was we came to be in a trunk."

Irish nodded weakly to the space before him.

"Ahem . . . arumph! Well, honorable sir, it is really very sorrowful that such a gentleman as myself should allow myself to fall into such a low estate. However high a man may soar, he can always again sink into the depths. Of course, you know that I died two months ago. It must have been front-paged here in New York, wasn't it?"

"Why . . . er . . . no, I don't read the papers much. Except the consensus and the track reports," Irish hastily added.

"Now y' talkin'," croaked Machine-gun. "I useter foller the dogs m'self. I bet on a filly named Fleabite once that came in with a hundred G's on her snout."

"VERY interesting," said the senator mildly. "But to return to our presence here. The man whom you have no doubt seen is a very cruel fellow. Out of all the thousands of ghouls in the world, we saw fit to be victimized by the very worst one of the lot. We have seen his friends—other ghouls, you know—and so we are quite competent to render a report upon the matter. The fellow who attended each of us upon his deathbed and, after assisting in each death, trapped the soul. While I cannot truly describe the method he used, I can say that his power in doing so lies chiefly in an amulet which he carries with him about his filthy neck.

"He is, we suppose, a North African. Somehow, it pleased his fancy to enlarge his slave holdings with members of other lands than his own, and so he came to this country for that purpose—"

"And Lunnon," said Monty sharply.

"And London," said the senator. "Yes, to be sure. And, to be brief, he amused himself by selecting some speci-

mens which he probably considered very fine . . . ahem. Machine-gun Frezoni, my worthy compatriot, was, as you know, the leader of a well-organized band—"

"D' finest mob in d' State," said Machine-gun.

"And some of his enemies very mysteriously came into possession of the knowledge that Machine-gun would walk into a Times Square barber shop at such and such an hour."

"It was like bein' asleep," said Machine-gun. "Dis guy in d' toiban comes up and looks at me, and I walks right off after'm. Geez, was I batty!"

"And so Machine-gun, killed, was trapped by the ghoul. I was under the beast's influence when I walked through a thundering Washington rainstorm and so caught pneumonia, against which I had been repeatedly warned.

"Martha was at the head of a large charity organization and was visited by *him* in the course of her duties. She hanged herself, the papers reported—at least, that is the way her body was found. As for the Mortons . . . well . . . I might say the ghoul was a bit careless there. They're greatly in love, and the ghoul delights in tormenting her, just to see her husband writhe.

"But you, honorable Irish, are our savior in all truth, for the ordinary egresses for souls were blocked to us—"

"An' we didn't get no rain check," said Machine-gun. "It's quits and we ain't got a home and never will have no home."

"Dev'lish inconvenient," said Monty. "Especially since it is veddy doubtful if we can be heard by ord'nary mortals."

"What?" said Irish.

"Oh, yes," said Monty. "Quite so. Y'see, each of us has tried while the ghoul was leading us about, but evidentleh we cawn't be heard. I say, it's deuced strange that you can hear us."

"Say dat's so," said Machine-gun. "How come, kid?"

"By some odd chance," said the senator, "he may have an amulet about him."

Irish felt hands on him immediately, although they were very light, and a moment later a single leaf of rue came out of his jacket and dangled before him in the air. All was silence, but when the rue was put back in his jacket it was as though a radio had been turned on again.

"—polite at all to do such things, Machine-gun," reproved the senator. "After all, my dear fellow, he is our only hope."

"Y' mad, pal?"

"Uh . . . no," said Irish. "B-but maybe you'd better be going. I'll be missed if I don't go down into the lobby, and if you are goin' any place, why, gee, don't let me stop you."

"Going?" said the senator.

"Why . . . yes," replied Irish.

"But, my dear benefactor, we are not going anywhere that you aren't going, too."

"Y' mean"—*gulp*—"y' mean you'll follow me?"

"Why, yes, of course. Unless you've some natural objection. In which case we shall have to stay here."

"You'll have to stay? But I . . . I don't get it."

"My poor boy," said Martha. "You are so very worried that I feel terrible about it. But, you see, you released us and you are the only one that can hear us and you haven't any idea of how terrible it is to be as we are."

"Veddy nasty situation," said Monty. "But, I say old man, you can't just desert us, you see. We won't have it. It's deuced bitter bein' as chilly as we, y' know. And if you can think of something for us to do to change our state, why, that's splendid. But until such time as you *do* think of something, we'll jolly well have to stick on your coattails, eh, senator?"

"I am afraid," boomed the senator, "that that is the case."

Irish shuddered. "You . . . you mean you'll go everywhere I do?"

"I cawn't re'lly see how we c'n help it, y' know," said Monty.

"Geez, pal, it ain't as bad as all that, is it?"

"N-no, of course not," said Irish weakly.

It was certain he could not skulk here all day, just as it was certain that the ghoul would return and find his victims missing.

"Oooh, what have I done?" wept Irish to himself. But he stood up and opened the door to scout the hall. All was clear, and without further hesitation he charged for the stairs and went down thirteen floors like a spinning mouse as though speed could leave them all behind him.

V.

IT WAS a wild-eyed Irish who stormed onto the mezzanine and slalomed the steps into the lobby. A hulk jolted into his sight, the crash of a collision resounded, and Irish sat up to find that he had solidly met a surprisingly solid drummer, whose sample cases were now strewn, like the planks of a wrecked ship, for ten feet all about.

"Wh . . . *puff* . . . where the hell . . . *wheeze* . . . do you think . . . *gasp* . . . you're goin'?" cried the drummer, scrambling to his feet.

Irish was already scooping the sample cases into a battered kind of order and had no answer whatever. The drummer loomed over him.

"I gotta good notion to slam you into an obituary column!"

Irish kept right on picking up the cases until he had them all. Then, seeing that the drummer, a known McGee, had been engaged in doing his own transport work to a waiting taxi, he accomplished a piece of jugglery peculiar to bellboys and was, on the instant, a pair of eyes and hands completely bounded on all sides with baggage. It was a fortunate maneuver, for no man wants to dent his fists on a sample case. The dark tower of luggage sped through the foyer and then, at the taxi's side, the foundation gave way and the bags thundered into their conveyor.

The drummer had raced after him, and now, though Irish was all ready to cheerfully chirp. "A sample of Burton service, sir, just to show you how eager we are to please," he never got a chance. The drummer leaped past him and into the taxi with a fierce order to get going. The driver did, in the rocket fashion so popular in New York.

Irish gave a sigh of relief to have gotten off with such ease, but the sigh had no more than escaped him when he was spun about so furiously that he almost fell into the gutter. Mr. Snide, the assistant manager, thundered so fulminantly that Irish was backed into the gutter, anyway.

"You fool!" cried Mr. Snide, and worse, "that man owed us a week's bill for room, service and extras! And now . . . now, while we were all waiting there to make sure he couldn't get away, you practically shot him out of the hotel! Oh . . . arrrrrh! Bwrrrrgh!" And Mr. Snide's rage got up to a pitch which his very extensive vocabulary wholly failed to reach. He went back and forth with clenched fists as though he had hold of his own coat collar and was fighting to free himself from himself to get at Irish.

However, fate intervened. One of those freakish whirlwinds which play their pranks in the Forties got its claws into a white wing's horde, and the air was full of old paper and cinders and last week's playbills, so that the two on the curb were instantly engaged in protecting their eyes and noses. Mr. Snide staggered backward and gained the safety of the foyer, where he seemed to recognize his surroundings—after a moment's digging with knuckles into his

face—and recollect that his dignity might suffer if he said any more. And so he stalked into the lobby, tagged by a very contrite Irish.

The manager was standing there, and Mr. Snide went up to him and muttered something, whereat the manager nodded judicially and Mr. Snide approached Freddie, the bell captain, and scowlingly communicated the wishes of the commanding officer. Freddie licked his chops and stood waiting for Irish.

With a horrible nausea Irish remembered what an awful time Billy Smithers was having getting a job, recommendations and all. But he marched up before the bell captain and tried to be brave.

"Your conduct," said Fred, "is inexcusable. Several times I've wised up the old boy that he ought to teach you a lesson and now he sees my point. That bill which you let that gent skip is going to be taken out of your salary."

Irish swallowed hard. The twenty-one cash pay he got every month was the backbone of his livelihood, and, as it was almost due, he saw starvation yawning before him. But even that was better than getting fired and so he bore up and took away the taste of triumph from Fred's mouth by approaching the cigar counter.

BECKY was not interested in petty details. She almost hauled Irish over the trays. "What did you find?"

Irish felt himself pale. He had forgotten about his true plight in that brief instant, but now he glanced hurriedly around him and then at the street entrance for the possibly returning ghoul. But as he saw neither his friends of the trunk—of course—or his true source of danger, he took a little heart.

"Don't kill me with suspense," pleaded Becky. "What did you find in that trunk?"

"I . . . uh . . . I—"

"Listen, pal," said Machine-gun so near Irish's ear that he started violently, "if you got good sense you won't wise nobody up about this, see? If it was to get about that I was back, them rats that done me in'd take a powder and I ain't goin' to be put off, see?"

Irish looked searchingly into Becky's pretty face and was astonished to see no change come over it except increasing annoyance at being stalled. She hadn't heard Machine-gun!

"I . . . uh . . . nothing," said Irish weakly.

"Nothing!" said Becky. "All that trouble and me worrying my head off and you didn't find a thing!"

"Gee," said Bert, "now I c'n breathe. That sheik gimme the spooks, and if he found out you was monkeying around, he'd stick a shiv into you like you was hot butter."

Becky, on one hand, disliked the reply very much; but, on the other, she was glad to find there would be no trouble. "When will you stop getting these brainstorms? They'll get you into trouble one of these days. Like that—"

"Yeah," said Irish faintly, "they might, at that."

"You better hand back that pass," said Bert.

Irish wandered off and gave over the brass ring to the clerk.

"You got her in all right, did you?" said the clerk with a knowing wink.

"Uh . . . what?"

"I said, she's O. K. now . . . or ain't she?"

"Oh! Oh, that! Why, sure, sure. She was plenty happy to get out of that hall, let me tell you." And mopping his brow, Irish stumbled back to the cigar counter. All the while he half expected the air about him to break its silence, but the longer that silence held, the worse it got. He hated to hear the air talk, and now he found out he hated to not hear it talk.

Becky and Bert, having discussed the matter to their satisfaction, had, by

now, reverted to their more absorbing business of picking a few winners at Pimlico. They were going over the forms and disputing.

Irish listened with but half an ear, the other ear and half turned to the silence which bounded him.

"Me, I'll take Saucepan," said Bert. "Maybe the odds *ain't* so hot, but it's safe."

"I suppose that *is* a good bet, though Happy Days in the third looks so awful good. And here's Wishbone at a hundred to one in the third, too."

Suddenly the silence about Irish broke. "What? By George, that's very odd. Indeed it is!" said the senator. "Wishbone! A hundred to one."

"Geez, that's so," said Machine-gun. "I wonder how they ever got her down that high. That's a buy!"

"Ah, yes," the senator sighed. "I once took in a hundred and eighty dollars on a ten-dollar bet on Wishbone."

"Say!" said Machine-gun. "I got it!"

"What," said Monty, "have you got?"

"He means he has an idea," said the senator.

"Oh, fawncy that!"

"Shut up," said Machine-gun. "I ain't putting it out to hear myself warble, see. I tell you I never used to miss, and now . . . why, now it's come as clear as a bell to me. I see the track! I see them dogs throwin' dirt. I see the field bunched with No. 8 coming up, coming up. Ah, No. 8. Yes, it's Saucepan! Out in the lead is No. 5. But No. 8 is eating him up. No. 5, that's Happy Days! And No. 8 has him. They're neck and neck! They're coming down the stretch! But wait! Wait! Here comes another. Fifteen is pulling out of the field. Fifteen, that's Wishbone. And up she comes, up she comes. Now she's a length behind, now half a length. Now her nose is level with Saucepan's jock! Boy, what a race! What a race! And still she closes. And there's the wire right ahead. There it is and Wishbone— Look at the stands rise! Look at 'em and hear 'em roar! And it's Wishbone by half a length!"

"BY GEORGE," said the senator, "I can see it myself! Yes, indeed, I can. It's Wishbone! Say, my good friend, do you suppose that now we are, being as we are, able to see events in advance?"

"Frightfulleh int'restin'," said Monty. "Might have a bit of truth to it, what? You know, I seem to see the race, too, you know, and, by Jove, it *is* this filly Wishbone rompin' in. Deucedleh peculiah. Rawther!"

"I wish I had a hunnert G's to lay down on it," said Machine-gun. "It's hell to know all the answers and then not be able to use 'em, ain't it?"

"Indeed so," said the senator.

"Maddenin'," agreed Monty.

"Here we know all about the race," said the senator, "and we are unable to lay any wagers upon it, having neither money nor credit. And, despite my political sentiments, gentlemen, I was never one to discredit the necessity of capital. If I but had a thousand dollars at a hundred to one, I would be able to regain my former affluence."

"Can't we do nothin' about this?" said Machine-gun. "Maybe the kid would lend us a sawbuck, huh? Hey, sonny, how about it?"

"I'm flat," said Irish moodily.

"Hush," said Becky, at her phone.

Irish realized how far he had forgotten himself and determined to take no further part in such discussions. The less he had to do with these things the better off he'd be.

"Hello, Joe?" said Becky, having gotten her connections with the wire house at last. "Joe, this is Becky. . . . Sure. How are you? . . . Gee, Joe, that's too bad. Measles, you say? . . . No, I don't know how it is, Joe, but I can imagine what your wife is going

"But," protested Irish, "I don't want to get out. It's quiet and safe here. Go away."

through. All five of them, too! Imagine that! . . . Oh, I guess so. Got to keep interested in life, eh, Joe? What do you think of Saucepan in the third at Pimlico? . . . That's what me an' Bert thought, too. No, not a very big one. Say five, huh?"

"And five for me," said Bert eagerly.

"Bert wants five, too," said Becky. "Right on the nose. We'll—"

"Wait!" cried Irish. "Wait, Becky. You can't do that! Not on Saucepan!"

She looked up at him, her big, blue eyes all deep with astonishment. Irish had never come forward very boldly about horseflesh before.

"Look," said Irish. "I got it hot. I got a tip that's better'n any tip that anybody ever got before. I got a tip that's scorchin' the roof of my mouth! Not Saucepan, Becky. *Wishbone!* On the nose!"

"You on the level?" said Bert.

"I should say so!" cried Irish, a little hurt at being questioned at all.

"You know the jockey?" said Becky.

"Well—"

"Or the owner?" said Bert.

"No!" said Irish in sudden scorn. "What a lousy way to get tips! I got it from a source I couldn't never say a word about, it's that secret. I . . . I saved a fellow's life once and . . . well . . . he said maybe I had a couple friends if I wanted this tip, and he said he and two other gamblers was tryin' to get aboard for a hundred G's."

"A hundred G's?" gulped Bert, impressed.

"Gosh!" said Becky.

"And if you lay out every nickel you got on this Wishbone, we'll all be rich!" cried Irish.

"How much credit will Joe give you?" Bert asked Becky.

"Two hundred."

"Mine's up to fifty," said Bert. "Tell him to spread it all on Wishbone!"

"We'll treat you right if she comes in," said Becky.

"No question about it," said Irish. "She'll come in all right, all right, or I'll eat that carpet even down to the last tassel."

Becky took her hand off the mouthpiece. "I'm sorry, Joe. Listen. Bert and I want to lay all our credit on Wishbone in the third. . . . Who cares about her being a selling plater? You do like I said, Joe. That's it. Two hundred and fifty in all. . . . Sure, you know you can trust us, Joe. You haven't a thing to worry about. O. K., Joe."

She hung up, and Irish, like the prince of benefactors, walked proudly away to attend to his duties.

FOR the following two hours, nothing happened out of the ordinary. But three pairs of anxious eyes were fixed upon the clock over the elevators. And then Becky's phone gave its knell.

Bert's cage appeared magically and Irish, all hopeful of clearing his debt, bobbed up beside the cigar counter.

With shaking hands Becky took the phone. "Hello. . . . Sure, Joe. Sure. . . . *What?"* The receiver almost fell from her grasp. "Not Saucepan! Oh, don't say it! Don't say it! Oh," faintly. "Last, was she? . . . Well, don't worry about the money, Joe. I'll send it over right away."

Weakly she stared at Bert and Irish, and they already knew the worst. "Wishbone . . . ran last," said Becky.

Bert looked like he was going to be ill. Dazedly he stared at Irish.

Into the ringing silence cut Machine-gun Frezoni's harsh voice. "Geez, she's nuts. It was open and shut. It was in the bag, see? She's slap-happy."

"Extraordinary," said Monty.

"I fail to see," said the senator, breaking his peace very gruffly, "how she could be so idiotic as to believe what that Joe person might tell her. The girl, plainly, is a fool."

"Shut up!" said Irish, suddenly savage.

"I didn't say a thing!" snapped Becky. "Don't get so wise! I can lose with the best of 'em, and I wasn't going to say a word about it."

"Not me," said Bert gratingly and looked very well recovered. "I've had enough. A gag is a gag, but this one I ain't going to stommick, see? Empty trunks and counterfeiters and all, I ought to take a paste at you!"

"Go ahead if you feel so tough," said Irish. "Can I help it if I was wrong? Did I ride the horse?"

"What's the idea giving us the lie?" said Becky. "If you'd kept your big mouf shut we'd have won a couple of bucks apiece and now, where are we going to get what we *lost?"*

"I'll . . . I'll find some way to pay it to you," said Irish.

"Ugh!" said Bert, his patience quite gone. "For two cents I'd lay you flatter'n that rug you said you'd eat."

"Here's your two cents," said Irish, snatching them out of his pocket and throwing them into Bert's face.

Up until then the affair had been sane enough. Both Bert and Irish would never, under any circumstances, have fought in the lobby. The locker room was waiting for the affair. However, a few gestures, as long as they were inconspicuous, and a few words, as long as they were low, were not out of order.

Bert took hold of Irish's arm and, grim-visaged, began to push the offender toward the stairs. And at that precise instant, a terrible accident happened.

With terrific velocity, Bert went sideways straight into the cigar counter. There was a crash of glass and a scream and Bert came up in mad fury, blind to everything and slugging wildly at Irish. Irish wasn't out of his head. Valiantly he tried to quiet his assailant and get him away. But Bert would have nothing of it and sailed to destruction.

Abruptly Bert came two feet off the floor and was slammed loudly into the magazine rack. Bright covers cascaded all over him and then the whole thing crashed down.

Irish, in an agony of astonishment, tried to aid his aggressor to his feet. But strong arms seized Irish from behind and held him hard. Bert managed to get up, magazines cascading from him.

Irish twisted about to see that Fred and George and two others had him and that the manager, towing Mr. Snide by some magnetic force, was plowing across the lobby.

THERE was a horrible calm in which Bert breathed noisily through a bloody nose.

The manager surveyed the wreckage. So did Mr. Snide. The manager looked Irish up and down, so did Mr. Snide.

Becky, her Southern fighting blood at fever pitch, glared about her at a wrecked counter, spoiled wares, and wanted badly to have Irish out in an alley for about two seconds.

It was very final and very brief.

"Captain," said the manager, "I think we can dispense here and now with the services of this young . . . rowdy. Have the other boy clean himself up and get back on duty."

"Hold on!" cried Irish. "I didn't do a thing!"

"Sir," said the manager in a tone highly satisfactory to both Fred and Mr. Snide, "I distinctly saw you throw this young fellow into that counter and then, not content with that, hurl him bodily into that magazine rack."

"But I—"

"Silence!" said the manager. "Captain, carry out my orders."

Fred released the young gladiator as one rids himself of a rotten vegetable. The manager had walked away, followed by Mr. Snide, who had also had a word to say as the manager stepped off.

"You get your clothes and clear out of here," said Fred.

Irish looked appealingly about him. But Bert was glaring and Fred was gloating. And Becky— His heart lurched within him. Becky's look clearly bespoke the hatred she felt toward him.

"You clumsy clown," said Becky and turned disgustedly away.

That took all the fight out of Irish. He dazedly walked down the stairs and into the locker room, where he disconsolately hung up his uniform—and his meal ticket—for the last time. The fate of Billy Smithers hung low about his head.

"And no recommendation," he mourned, flicking a speck from the cuff of his uniform jacket as it hung there without him inside it.

"Cheer up," said a bright voice before him where there was only air. "Young sir, there were times in my life when the dawn seemed far away indeed."

"Right," said Monty.

"You poor boy," said Martha. "It was terrible of all of them! Here, you forgot and left your shoe polish in the locker."

The polish dangled before his face, but he was almost used to it by now and so he put it in his bag without comment.

"I told you to stop him, Tommy," said Grace.

"What could I do?" said Tommy crossly. "It all started so quickly I didn't have a chance."

"That's the way it's done," said Machine-gun, a trifle sulky. "You got to get 'em while they ain't lookin'. That's how I lived as long as I did, see? And if I thought it was a good idea to throw that punk around, that's my hard luck, see?"

"Nothing of the kind," said Grace. "You lost Irish his job."

"Well . . . how was *I* to know?" growled Machine-gun. "Besides, the senator helped me!"

"I . . . er . . . harumph . . . thought the assistance was timely," apologized the senator.

It went on where there wasn't anybody, before and behind and around Irish. He glared at the empty space before him.

"Look, I been in this business long enough to know what to do with my own dukes, see?" said Irish. "You beat it and leave me alone and I'll keep on getting along. You and horses! Phooey!"

"You tell them anything you please," said Martha. "They deserve it!"

"The poor fellow," said Grace. "Take his bag, Tommy."

The bag was hoisted about three feet off the floor and, as though on an invisible tramway, bobbed toward the stairs. Irish dashed after it and snatched it back. Sullenly he trudged up the steps to the lobby, little liking either his company or the prospect of having to cross it again.

He pushed open the swinging door and tried not to look as he hurriedly traversed the shiny floor for the last time. But he did look for all that and saw what he knew he would see.

Becky's wares were being put in order by a very gallant bell captain, upon whom Becky smiled with all her heart.

And Fred looked loftily at Irish and then away, as though he had seen something very bad indeed. He re-engaged himself in light patter with Becky.

Mr. Snide looked down his nose and Irish slunk out of the door.

VI.

HE MADE a dreary inventory of his possessions as he straggled down Broadway, buffeted by the matinée throngs—which were slightly offensive to him for the very excellent reason that they had jobs and money enough to

waste on box offices. His fingers counted loose change to the amount of ninety-two cents—including the phony quarter a McGee had given him. In another pocket he thumbed three one-dollar bills—taking them out and looking at them six separate times on the off chance that one might have unaccountably transformed itself into a fiver.

Tonight his landlady would be expecting thirteen. And, while Irish had always been very punctual with her, it would avail him little, for she was French, and a vitriolic vocabulary had early taught Irish that he must never on any account be anything *but* punctual. Irish would much rather step out in front of a taxi race than into the path of Madame Maljour exhibiting an empty palm.

Ordinarily, he would have gone home and cleaned up and dined in the company of Bert or, as on several glorious occasions, with Becky. But Bert wouldn't eat with him if he treated at the Waldorf, and Becky would have—Irish sighed. Now that he had neither job nor prospect, cash to speak of nor credit, and with the fate of Billy Smithers—who had his letters, too, damn it!—hanging like crêpe about his neck, Irish vowed he must be economical. And so he wore out twenty-five cents' worth of shoe leather in the next two hours trying to find the cheapest possible beanery.

He located a dive on Sixth at last and, swimming through a fog of greasy smoke, navigated himself to a table whose sole cloth was a coat of that same grease, solidified. Nothing, Irish decided, could be cheaper than this place unless it was the morgue, where guys didn't have to eat at all. The morgue had crossed his mind more than once in the past three hours, for there it was that men went who starved to death.

Irish pried some of the protective coating from the menu with a fingernail and discovered that baked beans and white bread could be had for a dime with a cupacawfee thrown in. He gave his order and sadly waited, dully interested in the struggles of a fly that had been careless enough to dive into a half-filled water glass. After a while Irish somberly took a toothpick and salvaged the mariner. Placing the fly on a paper napkin, he succeeded in drying him off, and by the time the beans had arrived the victim had fully recovered and was busying himself with the sugar bowl. Irish felt a little better—until he saw his beans.

Sometime in the early history of the place some long-dead proprietor had evidently placed a kettle of beans in a garbage can and the waiter had just now found them. Irish felt shaky for a moment and then managed to push the dish away from him. He inspected the coffee and was able to sound it clear to the bottom with his naked eye. And it wasn't warm, either. He reached for the bread but pulled back his hand. That ingrate of a fly had whistled up several squadrons of his fellows on the pretext that there was gold buried deep in the doughy stuff. Irish, cynically philosophizing upon the lot of the helpful in this world, gave it up.

But he had walked so far that he wanted badly to rest. And he had no liking for what lay before him. And so it was that he gazed disinterestedly around him at the other diners. Happy people! They worked and made money and spent that money for food. Their brows were all smooth as they noisily absorbed their ergs and dynes. And never in their lives would they be bothered by things beyond their understanding.

WISTFULLY, Irish contemplated a very well upholstered fellow who bulged with muscles and stored vitamins until his good health threatened the destruction of his overalls straps. This worthy had ordered ham and eggs for the third time. The other two platters

lay before him, polished as mirrors and, therefore, much cleaner than when they had left the hands of the dishwasher beyond those swinging doors.

Happy man! Nothing to worry about but whether his eggs would have the right do on them. Nothing would ever descend upon him from the blue and begin to talk where no man stood at all.

Irish suddenly remembered that his friends seemed to have retired. He perked up a trifle, thinking that they might have gotten confused enough in the crowds to lose themselves. Certainly they had been very, very quiet ever since they had lamely attempted to explain their actions in the lobby. Good, thought Irish grimly. They can pick on somebody else.

He felt so much better that he reached again for the beans. But once more he recoiled and sat back to observe the steaming mound of yellow, unwinking eggs and quiescent ham which was being placed before his neighbor on the right.

"Gee," said Irish, softly. "Some guys have all the luck, at that."

The carnivora in overalls took a breath, as does the swimmer poised upon the high board, executed "carry" in the saber manual ambidextrously with knife and fork and almost counted aloud, "One . . . two—"

But he never got to three. Without visible support his heavily laden platter was whisked upward, barely missing his nose, to hang suspended a foot before and above him. Dazedly, the man gazed at the platter and then he stiffened with indignation. He snatched for it, but it sailed away from him and dropped with a clatter directly in front of Irish. . .

Up went the beans, reversing the same route, to drop with a *clank* before the man in overalls.

"Dere y' go, pal," said a too familiar voice in Irish's ear. "Let's see y' get around that!"

But the man in overalls had other ideas. He rose up like a released balloon and glared at his platter. Irish's impulse to hand back the food was put into action too late.

"Hey, you! Wot's the bleddy idea? Them 'am an' heggs is mine!" And he snatched for them.

But the beans shot up and sloughed the aggressor mushily in the face, blinding him completely, and the dish fell back in fragments. With a roar the limey snatched for the platter and it, too, crashed to the floor. Irish was up and already on his way. Hands reached out to detain him, and though he shook them off, he was thrown off his course so that he collided with the cashier's cage and so caromed from a waiter to a brawny proprietor. They collared him, and the man in overalls, digging beans out of his eyes, stormed up with language.

"'E's a bleddy thief! 'E stole me 'am an' heggs right afore me blinkin' eyes!"

"I didn't!" cried Irish loudly.

"An' 'e's a bleddy liar! I seen hit!"

"Looka here, keet," said the proprietor, "you taka da food froma dis man's table. You breaka da two dish. You cracka da showcase. Iffa youa don' pay, I calla da cop! Dat'sa forty cen' da hamman da heggs, one dolla' da dish and two dolla' da glass inna da showcase!"

"That glass was already cracked!" howled Irish, squirming in the grip of three men with half a dozen more anxiously waiting for their chance to grab at him.

"You calla me da liar!" shrieked the proprietor. "You no paya me t'ree dolla' forty cen' I calla da cop!"

Irish finally found out that he wasn't able to command his own motions and gradually saw reason. Bitterly he gave up three dollars and forty cents, including the lead quarter. But the Greek would have nothing of lead and returned

it with a roar, having almost lost a front tooth on it. Irish made it good and, as soon as he had paid, he was called upon for yet another dime for his own food. That placed in the voracious palm, six hands and three right shoes ejected him halfway across the sidewalk.

Irish gave vent to his wrath and dared them to come and fight him one at a time. He peeled off his coat and would have charged had not yet another thing happened.

A PIECE of pavement, dug out of the new subway tunnel, soared swiftly from its moorings all of its own accord and with a resounding crash stove in the entire front of the restaurant, which had been a full plate window.

The enormity of it made Irish stop and gasp. But he didn't get much chance to wonder about it. Already on his way toward the scene of the yells, a policeman sped up at the sound of breaking glass, and Irish had not yet time to close his mouth before a hand was on his collar and a nightstick was up in front of his face.

"He breaka da window!" shrieked the Greek.

"I didn't!" howled Irish.

"I saw it!" chorused at least five others. And the testimony poured torrentially into the bluecoat's ears, accurately describing just how Irish had said he would break the window and just how he had accomplished it.

"Come along with yez," said the bluecoat, towing Irish away. "Stop bellerin' loike that, Nick, and get inside. I know you got insurance."

Nick took the order in part but would not deny himself the pleasure of seeing Irish led away, struggling and protesting, but being led just the same.

"Take it easy, kid," said an all-too-familiar voice. "We'll get him when he crosses—"

"Leave me alone!" yelled Irish in despair. "Leave me alone and don't never talk to me again!"

Machine-gun Frezoni muttered a glum, "O. K., kid. It's your funeral," and thereafter held his peace.

The officer, hearing only Irish's wail, took it personally and was more brisk with his shakings.

And, half an hour later, Irish was sitting in a cell, gazing stubbornly at the retreating jailer.

He took heart now that the darkness was silent about him. After all, the sergeant had only booked him for disorderly conduct and that meant, at the most, ten days. As long as he stayed in jail he couldn't very well be gotten into trouble, and so in jail he would stay. It was an excellent place to be, he decided, patting the rough, strong walls with affection. Nothing could happen to him here.

"Young sir, we deeply regret"—Irish groaned dismally and hid his face in the pillow—"that the actions of our fellow, Machine-gun Frezoni, are too swift to allow us to stop him. If he has brought woe upon you, then we are truly penitent and we will do all in our power to aid your release."

"Don't!" yelped Irish, coming out of the pillow with great speed. "Don't do anything! For the love of God, senator, if you want to make me happy, just go off some place and find a nice quiet place and sit down and stay there."

"But we can't," said Martha apologetically. "You poor, dear boy, we're being nothing but trouble to you, and with all my heart I feel for you. If there is anything I can do—"

"Nothing!" cried Irish.

"But I *do* wish," said Martha, "that you *could* get out. This . . . this is the first time I've ever been inside a jail."

"Jolly place, jails," said Monty with a chuckle. "Of course, we've far better jails in Lunnon, y' know, but there's nothing like a good jail sentence to

make one look kindly upon the fellow sufferer, what?" There was the sound of a cane tapping. "Why, at Cambridge, I fawncy I spent at least one night a month baiting the gaoler."

"Oh, Tommy," said Grace, "isn't this dreadful? Oh, I'm so glad that mother will never know anything about this. She'd die, I know!"

"God forbid!" said Tommy with alacrity.

"Thomas Morton, do you infer that —"

"Hey, youse guys, shut up," said Machine-gun. "The kid here is up to his neck in trouble, and if you gotta worry about somethin', worry about him and to hell wit' your ma!"

"Why," gasped Grace, "why, I never heard such—"

"Aw, sign off," said Machine-gun. "Shut up and lemme think."

"About what, may I ask?" said the senator suspiciously.

"Well, oncet me 'n' Tiger Mulrooney sprung Pete the Peddler outta the Bronx hoosegow and—"

"Hey, look," pleaded Irish, "can't you stop tryin' to help me? Just go away and let me be. You guys have got me so nervous now I've chattered my eyeteeth loose. Can'tcha let me have any privacy, huh? Can'tcha?"

"We regret," began the senator, "that circumstances prohibit our leaving you, our sole contact—"

"Oh, my Gawd," said Irish, pushing his face down into the pillow again.

But they went on, making the apparently empty room, except for Irish, echo with their shadowy voices. Irish stood it for almost half an hour and then had an idea. Stealthily he reached into his shirt pocket where he had stowed the rue and smuggled it under his mattress. The instant the contact broke the voices were not heard at all and Irish sighed with relief. He stretched out comfortably and composed himself for slumber.

HE might have slept—he did not know. But the next thing he knew he was awake with something very cold being pressed against his hand. He leaped two feet toward the dark ceiling and was on his feet, shaking. Confused, he could not readily piece things together, and the weird sight of a ring of jail keys suspended before his face—without anything at all to hold them up —made his scalp crawl.

"Wha-what's that?" he gulped. But he heard not a thing except the rattling keys. These danced to the right and left and then dropped and tried to get his hand to close over them.

Abruptly everything came back to him and he snatched under the mattress for the crumpled leaf. Sound blared into his ears.

"Gwan, take'm! Everybody's asleep! Why, geez, they might hang ten years on you!"

"My dear fellow," said the senator, "I seriously doubt the wisdom of trifling with the law. For years I was sworn—"

"Yeah, but dis is a eemergency!" said Machine-gun with emphasis. "Here, kid. Take my advice and follow me! And as for the rest of you, shut up and listen to reason. D' ya want the kid to be in here for a mont', maybe, just on account of us?"

"Oh, dear no," said Martha.

"Well!" said Machine-gun. "Then what's keepin' us?"

And, thereupon, the ring sailed over to the door and the key grated harshly in the lock. Evidently the block switch had already been thrown, for the cell door swung open.

"C'mon," said Machine-gun. "I tellya, they ain't a soul awake in the whole place!"

Irish cast the leaf from him and dropped to the bed to bury his face in the pillow. But a moment later one of them put the leaf in his pocket and turned on their voices anew. One by one they now began to plead with him.

There was the door, wide open. Everybody was asleep and all he had to do was walk out. And Grace, prompted by the disgrace of being in a jail, argued so long that Irish, at last, would have done anything to have shut her up—and was not at all sure that the ghoul was wholly to blame for beating her.

"Wait!" he cried. "Wait, wait, wait. Let me say something!"

All sound ceased and Irish glared into the empty gloom which surrounded him. "Listen. I'm goin' nuts. I don't want to sound impolite but you gotta beat it! Go off and bother somebody else!"

"Oh," said Martha, and her sob stabbed Irish.

"But I can't keep it up!" he protested. "You'll be gettin' me sent up for murder next!"

"Geez," said Machine-gun contritely. "If I'da knowed how you felt about it, honest, I—"

"Will you or won't you beat it?" said Irish, steeling himself.

"You poor boy, if we're really worrying you that much, of course we'll go away. But . . . but you see . . . I can't tell you. It wouldn't be fair."

"Go ahead," said Irish bitterly.

"You see," said Martha timidly, "we can't go where we were supposed to go when we . . . when we left our bodies. And you . . . well . . . you are the only chance we have to enter the world of the living once more."

"How's that?" growled Irish, suspecting that he was weakening and trying to deny it.

"Young sir," said the senator, "we are already deeply indebted to you. But to be frank, even brutal, we must admit that there is still one favor you must do for us. We have talked it over and we are convinced that our only chance lies through you. Already you had courage enough to face the ghoul and release us."

Irish felt the sickness of disaster coming upon him.

"And," continued the senator, "we feel that you would again take that risk for us if you knew that we would again be able to enter your world, the world we left."

"What . . . what do you want?" said Irish.

"It is the matter of the amulet," said the senator. "Know that the ghoul wears about his neck a small sack which contains a very potent weapon. By its means were we captured and only by its means can we be released."

"You mean . . . if I get that thing for you, then . . . then you will leave me?"

"Correct," said the senator.

"And unless I do get it, you'll stay with me?"

"As his nibs says," remarked Machine-gun, "to be frank and even brutal, much as we hate to do it, we got you on the spot. You want to see us go away happy and we want to go away happy. You get the sack and away we go. Until then, here we stay!"

Irish reviewed in dark indigo the events which had befallen him since he had first met them. And while the shadow of the ghoul made him shiver, there were still some things which were worse than risking that known danger.

"If you do this for us," said the senator, "our gratitude will be undying. Our solicitude for your welfare is not wholly prompted by what we want of you, of course. We already owe you a great debt and wish to feel that you are our friend. And—"

He went on for a long time, while Irish lost ground slowly and certainly. The senator's silver tongue had charmed whole crowds in his day and now, when he spoke from his true feelings, he could not be denied.

It ended with Irish getting up as one hypnotized and walking down the block, through the gate, past the snoring guard and down into the noisy dark of the street once more.

Irish eyed the floating suit, and earnestly engaged the salesman, hoping desperately the suit would go away.

But when he thought of being by himself once more, he took heart anew. He would finish his night in a park, and in the morning, once and for all, he would accost the ghoul, steal the amulet and be rid forever of these onerous souls. Just how he would get rid of them or what the value of the amulet was, he did not know—but time would tell. Indeed it would!

VII.

MORE slowly than he had ever answered the call of even a first-water McGee, Irish approached the scene of Hotel Burton, and he might never have gone on to a conclusion of his business at all had the senator not seen an acquaintance upon the street and, in sudden forgetfulness, slapped him on the back. When the dust had cleared and Irish had wearily apologized for "knocking off your hat, sir," he understood that there was nothing at all for it now; he had to carry on.

He shied at the sight of an officer—Jerry, who always parked his horse out in front of the Burton, the better to be seen in his spiffy uniform by the theatrical managers there. Jerry had always had an idea that he was destined for the stage.

When Irish slowed, Tommy's youthful voice implored: "You're really not going to stop now, are you? The ghoul used to be absent for a whole day at a time, and he may not have come back yet. All you've got to do is get into his room—"

"Quit it," said Irish. "My knees are knockin' bad enough now."

"But you haven't anything to be afraid of," boomed the senator. "For some reason or other you seem to be immune to his spells."

"Huh?" said Irish.

"Why, it's quite obvious, y' know," said Monty. "Th' blighter is able to magnetically attract to him almost any person he wishes. Frightful state of affairs. Why, we can feel him tugging at us all the time, but as long as we stay by you, y' see, we cawn't go to him, what?"

Irish halted. "Huh?"

"Raw*ther!* No end of incantations and what not. But you're an Irishman, don't y' see? Never had a bit of use for the bally Irish but I'm deepleh indebted to you for your racial characteristic."

"W-what?"

"Why, the race is always hobnobbing with spirts, y' know. Evidentleh you are quite impervious to his dev'lish dragnet. He cawn't make you chase about and all that mereleh by thinkin' it ovah. Jolly, what?"

Irish had come to a whole stop now as an awful thought dawned upon him. "You . . . you mean he can call anybody to him that he wants?"

"Oh, raw*ther!*" said Monty.

"But . . . but, gee! How can I tell but what he's hauling me to him now? I'm going straight to him, ain't I?"

"Now, now, now," said the senator. "That is quite another thing. You are carrying out a duty in our service and we understand fully that your own bravery is not to be questioned. We cannot but admire the fearless—"

"Hold on," said Irish. "That isn't gettin' this thing straight at all! This may be a trap. He may be waiting up there all ready to pop you guys back in his trunk and add me to you!"

There was a painful silence immediately following, and Machine-gun Frezoni at last broke it. "Look, pal, y' ain't goin' to yellah on us, are yuh? Y' came this far widdout anythin' happenin', and the fack that you could walk away now if y' wanted to is enough to tell yuh that His Nibs ain't pullin' yuh into him, see? Bulleeve me, if he wants yuh, he wants yuh, and there ain't no monkey business about it. I'm tellin' yuh, you're . . . you're—"

"Immune," said Monty.

"That's wot y' are," said Machine-gun. "So let's get goin'. If you knew how cold it was, bein' like we are, and how awful it was and how anxious we was to come to life again, you wouldn' stand around fightin' the breeze this way. Hump, sonny!"

THE SPECTACLE of a young man standing in the middle of the sidewalk holding converse with himself had proved very interesting to the mounted cop, Jerry, who now edged slowly up the curb. Finally he recognized his man.

"H'lo, Irish, me b'y."

Irish started and turned red and white at intervals. "H'lo, J-J-Jerry."

"Y' look sick."

"N-n-no, I'm f-f-fine," replied Irish.

"It's come to me ears that you lost yer job. Fwhat was ye up to now that they'd tie the can to yez?"

"Oh . . . I . . . I just got fired, that's all." And as Jerry didn't seem to be on the verge of running him back to jail, he took heart. "I'm just now goin' in to get my job back."

"Oh, they filled that. Right away, too. Kid named Billy Smithers is in there warmin' the bench roight now. An' a bad time it is to be losing a job, Irish."

"Maybe they'll have something else."

"Doubtful, me lad, doubtful. But there ain't no harm in tryin', I sez."

Irish got by and sidled into the foyer. He paused, examining the lobby before him, getting up his nerve mainly to face Becky. But Becky was off duty, and her second was wrapped in conversation with Smithers. Neither did Irish see Fred, and he took heart.

Boldly he approached the elevators, trustin' to the number of people about him for his camouflage. He waited before the doors, nervously watching the indicators in their nervous searches around the dials. If he could get up to 1313, there would be plenty of time then to formulate a plan. Just how he would accost his archenemy, the ghoul, he did not know, but he was desperate enough to try most anything.

However, the fates were tired of him.

Out of the basement doors walked Fred, coming off shift. And simultaneously, out of the elevators, stepped Becky, all decked out to go shopping.

The two merged not six feet from Irish and saw him both at once.

Becky was suddenly haughty and Fred's face darkened.

"Oh," said Fred, licking his chops. "So it's you, is it? Tryin' to sneak back and rob the rooms, I'll bet! Beat it!"

"I was goin' to see a fellah—" limped Irish.

"Smithers!" roared Fred. "Ace!"

The new bellhop and his watch fellow leaped up.

"Kick him out!" cried Fred.

The battle which ensued was very short, though fierce. Fred tried to stand aloof, but in some strange manner the ash receiver caught him in the leg and sent him down, and when Mr. Snide came up to help, Fred charged in like a madman, and Irish, a few seconds later, was ruefully regarding a torn place in his pants.

"And stay out!" roared Mr. Snide, brave before his bellhops. And even though the doors came off their hooks and dealt Mr. Snide a very sharp blow on the nose as they slammed, it helped not at all.

"Run him in!" shrieked Snide. "Arrest that man!"

And before Irish could do anything about it, Jerry had him gently by the arm. "Come along with yez," he said gruffly. And with his horse trailing along behind, the officer escorted Irish down the street.

Not knowing just how Jerry would get his, Irish said, prayerfully: "If you got any regard for me, leave'm alone!"

"What?" said Jerry. "An' who is it that yez want left alone?"

"I was talking to myself," said Irish.

"I ought to run you in," said Jerry. "'Tis unsightly to be having a party like that in the Burton." He walked thoughtfully for a little ways. "But they was four and yez was wan, and if I iver see the day win I'll lock yez up, Irish, 'tis a sad day that will be. Now along with yez and behave yerself."

Irish gave a sigh of relief, as much for Jerry as for himself. He grinned in sickly fashion and took himself down to Broadway.

THE CROWD was thinning, now that the day's business was in full swing, and he stopped to contemplate the sunlit street, wondering at the carefree faces that he saw. A cup of coffee dripped endlessly and some doughnuts made of brittle glass dropped over a hook without end and a man on a flying trapeze went a hundred feet across a billboard's red face to get a can of beer which vanished immediately after. What with fifty-foot pieces of gum and candy all doing strange things, and pigs that ran and sodas that sparkled, Irish got so hungry he could scarcely stand it.

Very often he had stood in this exact spot before, wondering on the most profligate manner of spending an evening. But now he had neither hopes nor cash and the added feeling that, at any moment, the sky was going to collapse on his head. Advice surrounded him in the night air, but he gave it no heed. Tiredly he sagged against a lamppost and laid his head over against its red box. He couldn't go home; he couldn't eat. And he was too well dressed to try any panhandling even if he would have stooped so low.

He had been there perhaps ten minutes when a gasp on his right was quickly followed by gasps on his left. He stared around him for the cause and finally looked back toward the hotel.

There, all in white, walking with a slow sureness which would have struck terror to a heart of steel, came the ghoul!

He was still a hundred feet away, walking like a cat on the trail of a mouse, said mouse already in sight. The mouse shot out a hand, steadying both mind and body.

The ghoul came on, strolling, his terrifying eyes burning holes in Irish's face. The sound of chattering teeth marked Monty just beside him. The ghoul could see them all, and now that he could fix them with his eyes, like the naturalist sticks pins in butterflies, he took his time.

The seconds dragged into a minute, and the ghoul stood ten feet from them, regarding them with a bitter kind of satisfaction. He held the pose for a long while and nobody moved an inch. Then he tried to take a step forward.

But something strange was happening which Irish could not understand. The ghoul could not get his right foot any farther ahead of him. And he had equally bad success with his left.

Anger began to suffuse the face now.

"You think," he said slowly, "that you have outwitted me. You think you can rob me and then escape without suffering a fate identical to that of the others." The smile made Irish's flesh crawl.

Out of his cloak the ghoul took some powder in small metal containers. He measured out a trifle from each and mixed them with his finger in the top of one.

All the while Broadway, as ever blind, walked up and down and paid no attention whatever to the strange one in white or the youth who stood ten feet before him as though hypnotized.

"In a moment," said the ghoul, "whatever puny power that you possess by which you hold me at bay shall have vanished. Behold!" Into the air he tossed the powder. There was a flash

of flame and the fumes drifted slowly toward Irish, who was still unable to move.

Somehow, he understood that he must not breathe. He tried to tear himself away from the spot and could not. He even shoved hard against his support, but he felt as though bands of steel locked him there.

"In a moment," said the ghoul, "you will have to take a breath, and then, my young friend, we shall return to my quarters to teach you a well-needed lesson."

Irish felt his lungs begin to hammer and burn. The black smoke was curling like a thousand snakes all about his face and the touch of it was revolting.

Suddenly there came a far-off whine, a clang, a roar. For a moment it made no impression on the group. But Irish fiercely refused to breathe now, no matter if the world began to rock all around him!

Ten seconds later the chief's car shrieked to a stop and the fire engines clanged to a hysterical halt just behind him.

Out leaped the fire chief, staring all about. From Broadway a magic crowd swarmed to surround the gaudy trucks.

The ghoul was swallowed by the rush, buffeted about and almost knocked to the pavement. Irish was twenty feet away from him.

"Where the hell's the fire?" roared the chief.

And as there was not the least sign of one from the windows round about and as nobody dashed up with the news, firemen and chief fell to swearing.

The chief planted his stocky self in the middle of the crowd and cleared a space all around him with the ferocity of his glare.

"Who," he said with seething gentleness, "is the misguided, imbecilic son of Satan that turned in that false alarm?"

The crowd milled. Over at one side the front rank erupted and a man in white, surprise and rage stamped upon his face, was bumped up against the chief. The two almost went down.

"There's your man!" cried a bright voice in the mob. "I seen him do it!"

Firemen grabbed the ghoul, who shrieked: "Let me go! Let me go! I've been robbed!"

The bright voice in the throng did not further press the charge, and, there being no other witnesses—and as four firemen couldn't find the man who had been in the empty white cloak they now held—the chief growlingly gave it up as a bad job.

And by that time Irish was five blocks away and running like a whippet, a glittering amulet clutched fast in his hand.

VIII.

TO SAY that Irish traveled faster than the wind would not be wholly true —for the wind was right with him and the wind was talking.

"Geez, you done it, pal!"

"Oh, Tommy, dear, at last relief is in sight. You'll never leave me, Tommy, dear?"

"Never, my luscious cookie."

"And you'll never be a brute about mother coming to live with us again?"

"Hey, wait a minute," said Tommy's voice while Tommy's invisibility must have made a face. "I didn't—"

"Children, children," said Martha's soothing tones. "Soon we will all be free again and quit of this terrible cold. Be patient."

"Can'tcha run any faster, pal?" said Machine-gun. "I ain't yellah nor nothin', see? But when I think of us bein' almost on the out, we don't want that rat catchin' up with us. Boy, as soon as this is done I'm packin' in the biggest steak you ever laid your eyes on. You got no idea how awful it is never bein' able to do nothin' but shiver!"

Irish was already doing his very best,

but at the mention of the ghoul he found another m. p. h. somewhere in his muscles and, like a broken-field runner in the last minute of play, zigzagged down crowded Broadway, leaving a host of pedestrians convinced that they had just witnessed the successful escape of a burglar.

"You . . . you think maybe he'll trail us?" puffed Irish.

"Rawther!" said Monty, evidently close at hand. "The blighter is apt to break out his whatnots and mumbo-jumbo up a charm or something, what? Frightful fellow. No end of resources."

"A fiend incarnate," agreed the sailing senator. "Did you behold the manner in which he eluded the firemen after our young friend had so cleverly turned in the alarm? Vanished completely and left them with but a rag of himself."

"M-maybe he's around us right now," said Irish.

"Hurry it up, can'tcha?" cried Machine-gun.

"Sure, but where are we goin'?" said Irish. "I ain't got any idea of what you want me to do now."

"He don't know what he's got!" cried Machine-gun in astonishment.

"My dear young man," said the senator, "I trust you are still clutching the amulet?"

"Sure, but—"

"Therein, my dear young man, lies the key to our recovery. If you would bring us back to the world of living beings and out of this dreadful, terrifying cold of nothingness, you have but to use that amulet in a certain manner and, lo! we are restored."

"Y' mean I touch you or somethin'?" said Irish, still running and narrowly averting a collision with a hand truck.

"Not preciseleh," said Monty. "We are given to understand that we must first find adequate bodies into which we can step."

Irish skidded to a halt and stared around him at the noisy emptiness. "Say, wait a minute. If you guys think I'm gonna go dig up any graveyards, you got another thunk comin'! And if you got ideas about the morgue, forget 'em. Not for anything would anybody ever get me into no morgue! And for diggin' up a grave I'd get forty years solitary."

Evidently his convoy had overreached him, for the answer started softly and became louder, returning to him.

"My dear young man," said the senator, "we understood that you were willing to do anything to serve us in our dire distress. Not once have we found you lacking in the courage to culminate the most desperate of undertakings—"

"Shut up," grated Machine-gun. "Listen, cousin, you're gonna go through with this, no matter what it takes, see? If you don't, there's ways and means, get it?"

"I won't!" cried Irish.

"He won't," said Machine-gun in an ugly manner, the voice very close to Irish's ear.

"Don't hurt him!" wailed Martha.

"Oh, Tommy, stop him!" cried Grace.

"Get away from me," snapped Machine-gun. "Now look, sonny boy. We're gonna have us a showdown. If you show the yellah now, you'll be walkin' around with us and without no corpse. Get it?"

Wildly Irish tried to find his terrorist, but only the wind touched him and only the familiar sights of lower Broadway met his sight. He held out for a matter of five minutes, but the threat of a thing unknown at last seeped into him.

"Well, what do you want me to do?" he said finally.

"That's better," said Machine-gun. "I knew you'd get the idea, cousin. Now for business. Whose corpse is closest?"

There was a silence.

"Well?" chalenged Machine-gun. "Don't stand around like a lot of dum-

mies. Speak up! Youse guys was so anxious to get back to earth again. What about it now?"

THE senator cleared his throat several times. "As . . . er . . . a matter of fact, my good compatriot, I . . . er . . . might find it rather embarrassing to reinhabit my own body. I . . . um . . . had a serious liver condition, you know, and . . . ah—"

"I get it," said Machine-gun. "When you conked out, the government was tryin' to find out how many bucks you'd taken off the munitions outfits. Sure. Not that there's anythin' wrong with it, but it might be embarrassing."

"Um . . . I suppose . . . ahump . . . it would be, at that." He coughed in relieved fashion. "Not, of course, that I was guilty, for there is no greater enemy to the moguls of war than myself. But the . . . er . . . charge might be a little difficult to disprove."

"That lets you out," said Machine-gun. "O. K., Tommy, how about yourself, huh? You 'n' the little woman was bumped off somewhere around here, wasn't yuh?"

Tommy was silent for a while and then hesitantly replied: "I have been giving the matter some thought, Machine-gun, and I don't think . . . that is, I guess it wouldn't be . . . very easy to get at our bodies. We were pretty badly mangled, you see, and—Well, how about it, Grace dear?"

"Not that body!" she cried. "Never!"

"Geez," said Irish. "You guys didn't like yourselves very much, did you?"

"How about you, Monty?" said Machine-gun.

"Re'lly, now that I think it ovah," said Monty, "I'm not so frightfulleh eagah to be put back into the old meat. The war, y' know, full of bullets and all that sort of thing. Dev'lish inconvenient. An' then, y' see, I died in Lunnon, and it makes me frightfulleh weary to think of this young Ameddican stumbling about Great Britain. Rawther a bit of ado to get him over the pond, y' know. Pers'nalleh, I cawn't see it. Quite!"

"I never seen such a lot of dopes!" raved Machine-gun. "You gotcher chance. You wanna freeze to death from now till doomsday? How about you, Martha?"

"Please don't pick on poor me, Mr. Frezoni," whispered Martha. "I was just a poor lone woman, a maiden lady of fifty years, and my life was empty. I never had a chance to have a good time, Mr. Frezoni. I . . . I was so awful ugly. Please, Mr. Frezoni, for all this time I have been dreaming about being some—please don't laugh at me—some pretty lady. Don't make me return to my ugly self!"

"Well, hell," said Machine-gun, gruffly, "if you put it that way. I getcher point. But, geez, that don't solve nothin'! Look, you guys have gotta have some sense about this! I never seen such a lot of dopes. Here you gotta chance to come to life again and you all got some lousy excuse why you don't wanna! If—"

"How about you?" said Irish suddenly.

"Me?" said the air which was Machine-gun.

"Yes, you!" said Irish.

"Why . . . hell! That's different. They hadda bury me with a derrick, I was so fulla lead. And if you think you'd like to come back to life with a broken nose an' a limp . . . hell!"

There was a titter all about and Irish felt better. But soon the sound subsided as they began to consider ways and means, and Irish finally felt that they were all looking to him to get them out of their dilemma.

"No!" said Irish. "No graveyards or morgues! That's that! I ain't goin' to monkey around with stiffs! I helped put two of 'em into baskets at the Burton and that's all I ever want to see of

them! You guys can think up your own ways of getting out of your jam and leave me out of it."

"Cousin," said Machine-gun, "I just got the smallest little feelin' that maybe they'll be fishin' your corpse out of the Hudson. You keep talkin' like that and somethin' is gonna happen."

Irish ran his fingers through his hair and sat down in dejection upon the curb. Was he going to be trailed by these things the rest of his natural life?

He thought and thought without reaching any conclusions and finally he again addressed them.

"Look, you give me the low-down. Just what"—and he held up the glittering amulet—"will this thing do?"

"You can touch a body with it," said the senator, "and that will give animation to the body providing one of us is near. I distinctly recollect that the ghoul so informed a friend."

"Yeah," said Machine-gun. "But that ain't all of it. He said if you didn't use it right, it'd blow up everything in sight." And he chuckled to think of it.

Irish eyed the thing studiously. It was in the form of a single flame represented by scintillant rubies and all about it glittered diamonds to form radiating lines. It almost blinded one to look at it and, suddenly afraid it might be lost, he shoved it into his coat again, aware of curious eyes along the sidewalk. Although rubies and diamonds could not be anything but cold to the touch, the single flame was making itself felt even in hiding. For, whereas the ghoul might have overlooked the theft of the souls on the grounds that there were many more to be had, he would certainly never rest now until he had regained his amulet and laid Irish very low. It was such a gruesome prospect that Irish shivered along with his invisible companions.

Not wanting to appear conspicuous, he got up and started walking once more, taking himself south and east to wander at length into a section of Manhattan which is one long line of clothings and small vestings, cabbages and hokey-pokey carts, slatternly gossips and headlong gamins, all of which is ironed down by rumbling trucks and a cinder-laden wind which smells of last year's fried fish.

UNCONSCIOUSLY he was making his way toward the dwelling of Madame Mystic, though he was not immediately fated to arrive there. Along his way stood a store of more pretentious aspect wherein a great volume of clothing—lately thrown off Fifth Avenue and Broadway—was derelict. The spider, in the form of an obese merchant, lounged with apparent unconcern in the doorway, though ready, none the less, to pounce upon the first unsuspecting fly. Irish looked very presentable for all the abuse he had so lately suffered.

"Nize morning, ain't it?" said the spider, emerging so as to block Irish's path.

Irish came back to New York with a start and blinked at the barricade with some annoyance.

"My, but dot's a vine zuit you got," said the spider.

Irish was slightly mollified. He had always been proud of his clothes.

"It'z easy to zee dot you got a goot taste for cloze," said the spider. And then he saw something which made him very sad. "Oof! They is torn, your pentz! My, my, my, but ain't dot a shame! And zuch a nize pents, too! How did it heppen?"

Irish regarded the tear soberly and bitterly recalled his scuffle at the hotel.

"My, my, my," said the spider. "Dot's so awful it makes me sed! Now, ain't it too bad dot dem kind of pentz never can mended be. And, my, vot a sed sight it is to zee soch a hendsome young men vearing such a torn plaze in der

pentz. Und soch a luffly morning, too! Now look, young men, all der whole morning I ain't one customer hed. Vot you say I make you a prasant practically of a nize zuit. Positivel, I make a gift! Now look, you come in and I show you vot nize zuits I got."

Irish would have refused, not having any money and having several suits at home—if he ever did get money enough to go back there—but he was robbed of his breath by the spider, who now turned into a towboat and propelled him with great force into the dimness of the store. The spider, keeping a good, solid grip on Irish's coat tails, pulled on the lights and beamed upon his customer.

"Now! If you heppen to zee anything dot you vant, you zay so and maybe we a deal make, vot?"

Irish gazed around him at the tiers and tiers of suits, all on their hangers. Unlike most such stores, the place was not dusty and the suits showed signs of having seen higher street numbers. The ladies and gentlemen's wear were on the same side, and at the other end of the store there were several well-dressed dummies standing about in various attitudes of resignation. The dummies, too, had once seen higher numbers but had been thrown out of Fifth Avenue when modernism crossed swords with reality and vanquished it in favor of manikins which were mostly orange yarn hair and wooden neck. Those about Irish were extremely handsome ladies and gentlemen, apparently feeling that they had come far beneath their station.

Irish heard a gasp of delight, though it was not recorded by the spider. A hat, all by itself, came down from a high shelf and went waltzing up and down the aisle about five and a half feet from the floor. Irish gulped and engaged the spider in eager conversation, praying that the fellow would not turn around.

A natty jacket came drifting from a hanger, filled out mysteriously, and followed the hat. Irish began to sweat.

"Now you got zenze, I can see," said the spider to Irish. "Vot a netty liddle number like this vould do to you iss a grime! My, my, my, but couldn't der ladies go nutty mitt you!" And he proudly held up a purple checked coat.

Not knowing what might happen if the spider beheld choice garments parading through the air, Irish was anxious to please. He made as if to remove his coat and became acutely aware of the amulet in its pocket, instantly resolving to part with his jacket as with his life.

BUT the spider had seen the gesture and he was nothing if not helpful. Super-salesman that he was, he well knew that a man without his coat is a man sold. And so he added his own efforts with great strength and speed.

They wrestled for a moment, and then Irish was robbed of his power of defense by beholding a dress come sailing down the far side. He was looking over the spider's shoulder, and when he paused to see if the spider had noticed, he was undone. His coat was swept away from him and he almost cried out to see that the amulet was dangling, held to the pocket only by its cord. The spider, doubtlessly blinded by the purple checks of the garment he wished to sell, saw nothing of it and grandly tossed Irish's coat over the shoulder of a very handsome male dummy. The amulet clinked musically against the effigy's neck.

"Now it giffs a good look," said the spider, jamming Irish into the very tight jacket and hurling him toward the mirror. "See! It fits like der paper on der vall! Oh, my, my, oh, my, how hendsome! Oof," he said waggishly, "but how der ladies vill fall for dot!"

Irish had no eyes for the mirror. He was trying to see if the amulet had clung to the coat, and as he strove to turn

and stare over the spider's head for this intelligence he was paralyzed by what he beheld.

The coat had fallen to the floor and the amulet lay beside it. And the dummy—the dummy!—was bending over to pick it up!

Irish felt that he was going to faint. But he opened his eyes and found that the dummy was very reverently brushing the garment. A change had come over the skillfully carved face. It was no longer an inflexible thing of paint and glass but had a rosy, healthy look about it. The eyes turned toward Irish and the dummy smiled very pleasantly as he laid the coat aside.

The spider was too busy with his selling to see anything but a sale, and so it took him a minute or two to discover that Irish was gazing fixedly at another part of the shop and was the color of a Tuxedo shirt.

The young man—so lately a dummy—now took the amulet and touched a lovely young female dummy upon the arm. Instantly she relaxed her stiff and unnatural pose and swung about to throw her arms gladly around the young man.

"Oh, Tommy!" she whimpered in ecstasy. "Oh, Tommy!"

At the sound of voices the spider turned and looked wonderingly across his store. He turned back to Irish and then seemed to register that all was not well elsewhere. Again he searched the place and, with great indignation, stalked to his "dummies" and started to arrange them properly, saying, "So it giffs a joke, does it!"

Tommy rudely and roughly thrust the spider aside. "Take your filthy hands off my wife, you scoundrel!"

"Shut up," said the spider, thoughtlessly going ahead with his task and putting the beautiful lady to rights. But the next moment he turned as white as was possible and stared until his eyes were like baseballs.

Tommy gave a hard shove, and the spider sat down, upsetting an entire rack of clothes.

"Oh, Tommy, how handsome you are!" breathed Grace. "And how strong!" And she promptly kissed him.

The spider was rightfully wrathful. "Vot's der big idea, huh? Vot bizness you got pushin' me around here? I pay fifteen dollars for the two of you and—" The enormity of it struck him when Tommy assumed a belligerent pose. The spider cowered back and whimpered: "I don't mean nothingk! I vas only kiddingk! Don't hit me!"

"Come," said Tommy, majestically. He took Grace by the arm and paused only long enough to grip Irish by the hand by way of thanks too great to be spoken. Irish felt something cold in his palm and found the amulet. When he looked up, Tommy and Grace, as handsome and lovely a pair of human beings as could be found for miles around, were strolling out of the door.

The shriek, "Robber!" brought Irish back to the business at hand. The spider had leaped up and was in the act of tearing the purple checks from Irish's back.

"It's a trick!" cried the spider. "Vot chance has an honest man got mitt you loafers! It's a plot to steal mine cloze! But you'll pay, you bummer. You'll pay!"

Irish snatched up his own jacket and tried to dash for the door, but the spider was instantly on his trail with screams calculated to reach Centre Street and Governor's Island. It seemed that Irish was about to lose when the spider ran solidly into an invisible wall and went down so hard that he took three more racks of suits with him. These muffled his wails, and with Machine-gun's cheering, "Cheese it, kid!" ringing in his ears, Irish put blocks between himself and the scene of the miracle.

WHEN he was forced to stop for breath he found that he still clutched the amulet and he stared at it with some misgivings. What powers it had to do such a thing! To transform passive wood into vibrant flesh and blood!

"Deucedleh int'restin'," said Monty's drawl close at hand. "From what I understood, that blighter Tommy was not at all a handsome brute before he ran into the ditch."

"The skirt wasn't no traffic stopper, neither," added Machine-gun. "But, boy, I could go for her now!"

Irish sat down on the curb, giddy from his harrowing experience. After he had breathed a bit he gazed at the emptiness about him and grinned. "Well, that's that. All I gotta do is touch somethin' and it comes to life. That beats diggin' up stiffs by a mile and a half any day. Who's next?"

"I say," remarked Monty, "but you're holding forth a frightfulleh bleak prospect, what?"

"Huh?" said Irish, who had been congratulating himself that now all was well.

"Why, naturaleh," said Monty's several cubes of air. "Here I am in Ameddicah."

"I don't get it," said Irish. "All we got to do—"

"This," said Monty, "is not Lunnon."

Irish was a little cross, having long ago forgotten what food tasted like and having no prospect of any in the near future, not caring to risk the lead quarter nor even daring to enter a restaurant. "Look," he said, "I've gone to a lot of trouble tryin' to put you guys to rights, and now, I suppose, you'll stand around an' beef about things I can't even get through my head. What the devil has London got to do with this amulet?"

"Why," said Monty patiently, "in Lunnon I might find some suitable habitat, doncha know. But in Ameddicah, why, re'lly— I cawn't bear the thought of becoming a clothing-store dummy with 'Made in Grand Rapids' stamped, no doubt, on my spine. If this were Lunnon, one could count upon the qualiteh of statuary and all that, but heah in Ameddicah—"

"I got it!" cried Irish. "Geez, why didn't I think of that before! There's a place around here somewhere that's jammed full of statues. Th' very thing!" And he bounced up, all confident.

"Statues?" sniffed Monty. "Re'lly, old boy, I cawn't fawncy Ameddicah containing any noteworthen objects of art. If you insist on this sort of thing, I cawn't say that I'll like it."

But Irish was not to be downed. He had some vague recollection of having seen a museum somewhere within the radius of a mile, and so he set out looking for it, bearing ever southward, knowing he could save himself shoe leather by accosting a policeman for directions but not exactly caring for that, either.

Success had flamed but briefly, however, and without having found any such gallery, he was brought up by the sight of the Battery. The dusty park was briskly buffeted by a wind from the sea, and the Aquarium and Barge Office stood stanchly ready for business. Irish fumbled his way to a bench and sank wearily down upon it. He might have known better.

A sharp, ecstatic "Oh!" from Martha made him lift his head with misgivings. Of course, he could not see where she was looking, much less herself.

"What's up?" said Irish.

"Please," said Martha, in a wheedling voice. "Would you . . . do me a . . . a favor, poor boy?"

"What?" said Irish, suspiciously. And then his glance wandered over the scene and he knew the worst. He leaped up in horror. "No! No, I tell you!"

"B-but why not?" said Martha, hesi-

"Stand up!" Irish whispered desperately. "I can't, you fool, with all this wrapping," the mummy answered tartly.

tant but still pleading. "She is so beautiful and she welcomes all the ships and—"

"Never!" cried Irish. "Lady, I'll make you Greta Garbo if I have to, but I'm doggoned if I'll bring the Statue of Liberty to life!"

"You tell'm, kid," said Machine-gun.

"But why?" said Martha. "She's so beautiful and so calm and all the ships —"

"We're getting out of here," stated Irish with finality.

"I won't go," said Martha with sudden spirit. "If you're so anxious to be rid of us, why not let me be what I want to be! All you'd have to do would be to take that boat down there and go over and touch—"

"No!" cried Irish. "You ain't— It's nutty! Geez! What would happen if I did that? Why"—he grew suddenly cunning—"how would you ever get anything to eat?"

"Maybe . . . maybe people would bring me things," said Martha lamely.

"And can you swim?" persisted Irish.

"N-no."

"Well! It's way too deep for the Statue of Liberty to wade ashore, and I guess you'd get pretty tired of standing on that rock out there all right, all right, with people climbing all over you. Now!"

"It was such a beautiful idea," mourned Martha.

Irish mopped his face with relief. "I'll do anything you say in reason. Honest, I will. But it'll be a long time before I'll let any giants loose in New York. Geez, they'd give me thirty years on bread and water if I got caught stealin' that statue. We're leavin'!"

And, tired as he was, he immediately began to voyage north with the single thought of putting as much distance between himself and the Battery as he could.

IX.

POOR Irish! By the time he reached the Metropolitan Museum, his feet were upward to 2,000° C. and sizzled all the way to the back of his neck, and if anyone had touched him ever so lightly in the stomach they would have broken his spine. Only the sad remnant of his Irish determination was carrying him onward, for he had the sick feeling that, at any moment, he might hear from the ghoul—and the trouble was, he had no idea of just *how* he would hear from him.

Bravely he breasted the doors, appearing nonchalant before the eyes of an extremely distrustful guard. It was, he supposed, the tear in the pants which did it, but Irish knew he presented no fashion plate, what with being unshaven and all. But soon his uneasiness was put aside for other considerations.

He found himself in a hall, and upon every side of him, in bronze and chromium and wood, reposed statues in various attitudes, all striking. He sighed with relief and instantly looked back toward the place he had last seen the guard, realizing of a sudden that he was, in effect, about to commit a felony.

Having absorbed the panorama, he came down to particulars with all haste and one by one inspected the objects at hand. This was a modernistic hall where two lumps of granite in a peculiarly agonized shape were labeled "Mother and Child," and where two sticks were plated "Cavalryman." This was not greatly to his liking, though he saw possibilities in them. A white column, smooth all around and apparently nothing more than a pillar, was named "Coal Miner." A sphere with a hat on it was titled "Remorse." A pair of cubes with a stick behind was called "Cow at Play."

"Let's get the hell out of here," said the uneasy voice of Machine-gun.

"Somethin' might happen by accident, see?"

Irish got the point and was very careful to keep the amulet as far as possible from the exhibits—for, feeling as he did, he didn't think he could quite stomach the sight of "Cow at Play" rolling her cubes about the building. Leaving the hall behind him, he wandered at random, limping but hopeful, pausing now and then to consider more probable game. It began to intrigue him to think that by one touch of his amulet he could bring to life anything which might possibly live around him and, with that facetiousness which sometimes accompanies hunger, he made the senator's invisible hair stand up straight by some of his suggestions.

The farther he went, however, the more hopeless he began to think his task and the wilder became his offerings. But they wouldn't have a caveman and family and they thoroughly distrusted knights in armor when they found out that the face only was modeled.

At last, feeling downcast by now, Irish dragged himself between cases of papyrus books and ancient copper tools and sphinx heads and woefully considered his plight. The more weary he became the more certain he was that he would meet the ghoul around each successive column.

He found a place to sit amid upright boxes of carved wood and steadfastly stared at the floor between his feet.

"Come on," said Machine-gun impatiently.

"What's the use?" said Irish. "Everything I offer has got something wrong with it. I might as well throw this away," he cried with a wild gesture, "for all the good it's doing!"

He snatched back his arm—but he was too late. The amulet had swung to the length of its cord and clinked resoundingly against a wooden box. There was a shrill cry of despair and then silence.

"Geez!" cried Machine-gun. "Where's Martha?"

The answer was not long in coming. There came a dismal creak and Irish stared fixedly at the "wooden box" which reared up at his side. It was an Egyptian coffin, and the scroll over it stated that here were the mortal remains of one Princess Tutaborin, murdered three thousand years ago before she could succeed to the throne.

A chill coursed up and down Irish's spine. The lid was slowly coming open!

There was not a sound in all the dingy building except the groan of rusted hinges. The carven face upon the top of the box was gradually turning so as to face the wall, and within—

Irish got hastily up and stood back, badly wanting to run. A figure all wrapped in moldy linen bandage was thrusting at the lid with her shoulder. Two great, dark eyes, filled with misery, appealed soulfully to Irish. The exquisite delicacy of the young face was a mask of grief and the glowing white skin was touched with pallor.

"Don't let me fall," begged Princess Tutaborin.

Irish gulped down his fright. Gingerly he reached out and touched the shoulder. It was not hard and crusty as he had expected, but soft and moving gently as she breathed. Trussed as she was, she certainly would have toppled into his arms if he had not caught her. Anxiously he laid her out on the bench and began to strip off the linen bandages.

HE WAS too busily at work to hear the footsteps behind him, and the first intimation he had of disaster was a blood-congealing shriek. He whirled to find a middle-aged woman of bulk and a frightened little man staring roundly upon him. The woman screamed again and from afar there came the thunder

of the guard's frenzied running.

"Thief! Thief!" roared the woman, laboring Irish with her umbrella. "Grave robber! My husband brings this prize all the way from Egypt and you—"

Irish was stunned and fell backward over the bench just as the guard careened into view. That worthy took it all in at a glance and emitted a bellow which shook the lofty rafters. With premeditated murder stamped upon his bulldog face, he swooped to the bench and snatched over it for Irish, club held on high.

Irish had a vision of nursing a smashed skull for years and years in a dank dungeon, for, in his awkward position, he could not fend the blow. Down it came!

Abruptly it stopped!

The delicate hand of Princess Tutaborin was valiantly upholding the threatening wrist!

The guard was too wrathful to take it in. Angrily he shook himself loose and was about to strike anew when he found out what had blocked him. The club, upraised again, stopped there. The guard's eyes grew glassy as marbles.

And Princess Tutaborin, regal as she was beautiful, rose up and said: "Leave this young man alone, you brute!"

The guard stumbled back. The huge woman let out the cry of an auk and wheezily expired in her husband's arms.

But the little archæologist was not to be downed. He let his wife plunk to the floor and leaped forward with an expression of agony. "Princess! You can't do this! You . . . you owe me more than that! I dug you up! I dusted you and repaired you! Please, please, please get back into your coffin." And not until then did it come home to him what was really happening. He fell back.

Princess Tutaborin, her shapely legs now free of the linen, came gracefully up and glared the guard about twenty feet away from her. Then she faced about and, saying, "Come, Irish," she walked slowly and sadly away.

Irish had not lost his presence of mind and he saw the need of something else besides escape. So he whisked the coat from the prostrate lady, with muttered apologies and a promise to return it, and sped after his latest creation.

The princess was very downcast when he found her in the next hall, but she brightened a little when he threw the coat about her. Her jeweled headdress clinked musically as she bowed her thanks.

"Cheer up," said Irish. "It could be worse. We gotta get out of here!"

And, hurrying her forward, he held the main door open and then fled with her down the steps. Certain of immediate pursuit, he glanced to the right and left as they sped along, and the first sanctuary that met his eye was a subway entrance. He urged her forward and, hopefully gripping the lead quarter, approached the wicket.

THE CLERK blinked a bit at the oddness of the young man's companion, but this was all to the good, for he raked in the quarter without a second's hesitation and shoved forth the change.

Irish dropped two nickels in the gate and they stood on the littered platform, surrounded with gruesomely grinning toothpaste ads and disgustingly cheerful partakers of digestion tablets.

"A mummy," mourned Martha. "And I had such *high* hopes. I leaned against the case ever so slightly and—Oh, dear. A mummy!"

"Cheer up," said Irish. "It could be worse. Geez, what'll I be in for next? As if that ghoul ain't enough, I rob a clothing store, steal a corpse from a museum, and now I pass counterfeit money. Boy, if anybody ever catches up with me—"

"But you haven't got to go through

life as a mummy," said Martha hopelessly.

Irish became interested in a chocolate-vending machine and invested a nickel on the spot. He was very polite, breaking the bar in half to offer some of it to his companion.

But Martha, that moment, was not interested in chocolate. In the mirror on the machine's face she had caught a glimpse of herself. In astonishment she studied the delicate beauty of her face, the lovely dark eyes, the voluptuous lips and pretty teeth. She cocked her head this way and that, making her jeweled headdress tinkle. In sudden wonder she viewed as much of her body as she could see and found it to be shapely enough to dethrone kings. She inspected her hands and saw how delicate were the long, tapering fingers, how soft was the skin.

"If you ask me," said Machine-gun, suddenly, "you didn't do so bad, pal."

"Why . . . why," cried Martha in joyous astonishment, "I . . . I thought I was like parchment and . . . and—"

"And you're a knockout," finished Irish. "What are you going to do now?"

She thought about it for a moment and then made her decision. "It has been so very long since . . . since I went away that now all my wealth must have been scattered and no one would ever believe me alive. My insurance must have been paid out, too. Oh, dear, perhaps I shouldn't have been so eager to return here."

"So what are you going to do?" said Irish, discovering that he was slightly dazzled by her exotic beauty.

"I once had a servant girl who left me to be married. I always thought she was a silly person, always reading books on transmigration and such things. If I had only known— But there. She married a mechanic and last year, when I sent their youngest a present, she was living on Fifty-third Street. If you want, you poor boy, you can come with me. You look too tired to breathe."

Irish didn't feel called upon to state that he was. He only nodded and, a half hour later, he and the ravishing Egyptian princess were standing outside a dingy door on the fourth floor of a walk-up.

THE princess knocked and Irish could not help but notice that she could not avoid a regal carriage. He could not avoid it because he couldn't take his eyes from that hauntingly wonderful face.

Footsteps sounded within and a frightened, careworn woman put out her head, all ready with the words which would send the creditors packing—maybe.

"Perhaps," said Princess Tutaborin—or rather, Martha—"it would be better if we step inside."

The rebuked heads which had appeared up and down the hall in other doors withdrew with asperity and the mechanic's wife hesitantly allowed her callers to enter.

Martha wasted little time on ceremony. "Katy, this is my benefactor, Irish."

The girl was astonished to hear her own name from strange lips and, engrossed in wondering where she had heard that voice before, curtsied to Irish.

"There is no reason to beat around about this matter, Katy," said Martha. "I used to laugh at you for believing that people came back to earth in other bodies." Katy was waiting with bated breath now. "I have come back."

Katy straightened up and then suddenly flung her arms about Martha's neck and cried: "Oh, I should have knowed that voice. Oh, *dear* Miss Dodson. Dear, dear Miss Dodson."

"There now," said Martha, almost brusquely. "There, there, don't cry so hard."

But Katy would not be denied and

thoroughly soaked the shoulder of the purloined coat. Then Irish saw her do a thing which told him much. Her fingers lightly touched Martha's new face, and Katy drew back, still weeping her joy, but remembering her task as a hostess. She reached out and touched the arm of a chair.

"Do sit down. Please do. Jack will be home in an hour or two, and if you need us, whatever we can do, he'll have the right answers." Two small children, black-eyed and brilliant with a recent scrubbing, came out of the two-by-two kitchen and hung upon her skirts. "We have company, Johnny. You don't remember Miss Dodson, but she used to hold you when you were a baby. Now be very good and talk to her while I make some tea."

Johnny gravely surveyed the callers with all the curiosity of his five years. But he recollected himself of a sudden and plunged off after his mother, almost knocking his sister down.

"I'll get it, mamma." And he leaped up on a chair and located both the teapot and the tea, which he placed on the drainboard. "Now don't burn yourself, mamma." As speedily he came back and stonily took his stand before Martha again, just as though he had been there all the time.

"Katy," Martha said in a low tone to Irish, "has been blind for more than three years."

NOTHING would have suited Irish more than to have remained there for a few hours, nursing a cup of tea in his tired hands and resting. But three things plagued him to get going once more, and those three things were named Monty and Senator Brallston and Machine-gun Frezoni.

He stayed only long enough to assure a very startled mechanic that the beauteous Egyptian was, in actuality, Martha Dodson and to explain to Katy that it was only natural for a fellow to wonder a little about such a thing. And then, content to leave Martha in such good hands, he allowed himself to be hauled forth into the afternoon and started again on his search.

"Whatcha dreamin' about?" demanded Machine-gun after they had walked for several blocks in no particular direction. "I gotta get goin' and nail them rats down on Foist Avenue."

"Sooner or later," announced the senator, "our infamous enemy will appear, and before that happens I . . . ahum . . . want to be very certain that we are properly billeted."

"O. K.," said Irish, annoyed. "If you're strainin' at the leash, get your head busy on what I'll do with you."

"Rawther difficult to think, y' know, when one has no head," stated the air which was Monty. "Personalleh I am weary of it. Certainleh you have nothing to offer me in this country, what? I would not be as fortunate as Martha, having no blind friends to take me in, and I rawther fawncy the family would be a bit startled if I trotted up as a Pharoah. As for me, I suppose I am doomed to shiver it out and take my chances with that bally ghoul. You chaps can have your pick."

"I'm only interested in one thing," growled Machine-gun, "and that's bein' somethin' that's tough enough to get them doity rats down on Foist."

Irish sighed deeply. "That's O. K., sure. But you ought to figure out just *what* you want to be before I lose *all* the leather I'm standin' on."

"I," said the senator with a decisive cough, "have made up my mind."

"At last," breathed Irish.

"I," said the senator, "have decided to be George Washington."

"They got dozens of 'em in Bellevue," said Machine-gun pointedly.

"Ah . . . er . . . wasn't this Washington," said Monty, somewhat astonished, "wasn't this Washington a pirate?"

"Sir?" said the senator.

"Well, re'lly, now, I cawn't say as I'm frightfully well informed on the subject, but I understood that this Washington was a sort of buccaneer along with a chap named John Paul Jones. But the British almost jailed them, what?"

"Sir," said the senator with great dignity, "George Washington was the father of our country, the greatest statesman and general who ever trod the face of this glorious continent. And as for the redcoats 'jailing' him, as you so quaintly put it, I'll have you know, sir, that your very best generals tendered George Washington their swords, anxious to be quit of battling him!"

"Well, now," said Monty. "Fawncy that. But, re'lly, old chap, I was under the impression that George the Third gave the United States to itself as a sort of friendly gesture and all that. And as for fighting, why, I'm jolly well positive that it was the French army we British fought here in the colonies."

"That, sir," roared the senator, "was another war!"

"War? Re'lly, old fellow, I'm quite certain that your local fiasco was but a bally rebellion against paying lawful taxes. Righto, old fellow, I get the drift of it now. Bit muddy on my history for a moment there. You chaps made all sorts of a squawk about taxes assessed for protecting you from the French and the redskins and so George Third dropped the whole thing. But I cawn't say as I distinctly place this fellow Washington."

The senator huffed and the senator puffed and a couple of old newspapers on the walk whirled round and round very madly, the only visible thing to mark his agitation. But the senator's powers of speech, while quite able to sway a vast nation, were hardly sufficient to teach history to an Englishman and, finally, Machine-gun had to take a hand and quiet the whole thing.

"I *still* insist," said the senator, much out of breath, "that George Washington was a great man and that I shall be George Washington!"

"Bloody pirate," muttered Monty. "Burned tea cargoes. Humph."

Mayhem would have been enacted on the spot, but Machine-gun managed to drag the senator along.

They had gone some distance in hostile silence, when Irish looked about him and queried, "If you're all set, where am I gonna find a statue of him?"

"Union Square," said the senator promptly.

"You *would* get a place miles away from here," sighed Irish. And he debated between a cup of coffee and a subway ride and finally chose the former.

X.

PLODDING downtown, Irish realized the error of his ways. When he had passed into the Forties he had begun to tiptoe as though that would stave off any contact with the ghoul. And by the time he had reached Forty-fifth he was in such a state that when a hurrying messenger jostled him he went two feet off the pavement and ran a full block before he got control of himself again. Looking all around and hurrying as much as he could, he reached Forty-second Street and Fifth Avenue. Not until now did he begin to take in all the air he needed, and he had just gotten fairly calm when he was confronted by another crisis.

"Geez!" said a voice in his ear.

Irish stopped, unnerved. He stared all about him to find out the cause for the excitement.

"That's it!" cried Machine-gun. "Sonny boy, here's where you get rid of one more!"

Still Irish didn't get it, for no human sculpture was anywhere in the vicinity.

"C'mon, stop stallin'," demanded Machine-gun. "Do your stuff and read the

papers to see what I do to them doity rats down on Foist Avenue."

With a gasp of horror, Irish saw what was meant. He had stopped midway between the great marble lions which guard the Fifth Avenue Library with such smug disdain, and Machine-gun could not be planning anything else than to become a roaring beast about umpteen feet long and charge with bared fangs and red-rimmed eyes down the crowded thoroughfare!

"You . . . you're crazy!" cried Irish so loudly that at least ten people stopped stock-still and stared at him, convinced that they beheld a madman holding angry converse with himself.

"C'mon!" snarled Machine-gun. "Do what I say or you'll git de woiks, see?"

"But . . . but they'd shoot you on sight!" yelped Irish.

By this time the sidewalk was jammed and an officer was shouldering toward them. Irish got one glint of brass buttons and took to his heels.

Exhausted as he was, the thought of being charged with all his crimes poured the coal under his boilers, and he scarcely touched concrete until he was in the center of Union Square. He would have kept going even then, but sharp tugs on his jacket were retarding his speed and the senator was shouting at him: "Stop! There isn't a soul following you now!"

Irish was glad enough for the news. He would have sunk down on a bench already occupied with its quota of loafers if a heavy grip hadn't held him up. He was hauled toward the apple of the senator's eye, and when he got enough wind back to see straight once more, he found himself staring up at George Washington himself, all mounted on a frisky charger.

Irish looked around him, certain that everyone in the park was looking at him. Hastily he said: "No, look, wait! We'll come back here tonight!"

But the senator had evidently made up his mind. "We'll do it right now!"

There must have been half a thousand people standing or sitting about the place, breathing in the sunshine and fresh air along with large drafts of dust and oratory. Irish sized up the situation.

It became apparent that nobody was giving him any attention, for the center of that scene was a man in extremely dirty clothes who stood upon an extremely dirty box and shook, with his vehemence, extremely dirty hair down into his eyes with every period and exclamation point.

SOMEWHERE in the cool, high towers which lined the horizon, men in easy-chairs, smoking big cigars, were earnestly damning labor. And here, in the hot sunshine, men on hard pavement, smoking snipes, were earnestly damning capital. That neither one knew anything about the other was beside the point. The orator had his crowd and the capitalistic system was already well done on one side and was nicely sizzling on the other. Some few of the listeners were easing the burden of taking it in by supporting themselves against the pedestal of the country's founder and nodding from time to time at some particularly biting statement.

"Comrades!" cried the orator. "Comrades, the hour is at hand! No more will the working classes follow like sheep while the financial wolves lead them to starvation, disease and death, bleed them of their last ounce of manhood and cast them like dying dogs onto the city dump!" He "cast them like dying dogs" so hard he almost fell off his box, and there was some little confusion while the comrades straightened him up again. But his ardor was not dampened.

"Above you," he cried, "rears the effigy of this country's founder! You have been taught, comrades, that George Washington was the savior of these United States. You have been taught

that he dispelled the iron heel of oppression from the land. That is a lie!" He paused for applause, but when it didn't come he hurriedly covered the silence with his own roars. "This country was founded by the men with moneybags, by sniveling hypocrites who preached liberty and justice so that they could fill their filthy pockets with the wealth sweated from the brows of slaves! This country—"

But Irish wasn't listening. He was too busy trying to keep his feet while an invisible force towed him strongly through the loiterers about the pedestal. He shuddered at the thing he knew was about to happen to him, but there was nothing he could do about it. Vainly he wished for strength enough to resist, but he had run too far and eaten too little and now—

He was on the first step and then the second. The loafers were mildly amazed at the urgency with which he thrust between them and at the agility he displayed in suddenly soaring up to a perch directly under the rampant charger's belly.

"—and tyranny, bred of tyranny, has followed from the first!" cried the orator. "For a century and a half the laboring man had been *crushed* beneath the heel of his money-mad masters! What was begun in cunning hypocrisy, in the name of liberty—"

Another voice was in Irish's ears. "Come, come, my young guide. Touch the boot with the amulet and let's be done with this thing."

Irish wouldn't have, but he felt his wrist seized, and before his agonized gaze—which he quickly shifted to the heads of the multitude below—the amulet neared the stirrup.

"And as for the father of this country," cried the orator, "what was *he* but a capitalist? There he is, symbol of the man on horseback whose clubs bludgeon the working—" The orator stopped, gulped, stared. The arm he had raised to indicate the statue stayed paralyzed in midair.

George Washington moved impatiently in his saddle and glowered angrily at one and all. He slammed his cocked hat squarely on his head, rattled his sword in his scabbard and, snarling incoherently, got down from the inanimate horse. Standing hard by Irish on the pedestal, he looked as though he was about to commit murder and then, seeing the crowd, thought better of it and, in a towering rage, let himself down to the step below.

The orator screamed and staggered back off his box. "I didn't mean it! I didn't mean it! I'm paid to do it and I got to eat! Don't come at me! *Don't!*"

Whereupon George Washington bestowed the briefest kind of a glance upon him and, snarling something which sounded very much like, "Bally pirate!" went stumping down the pavement so hard that his spurs rang like fire alarms.

Half a thousand people stood up to watch him go, and full half the half a thousand felt very certain that they were going to faint. But George didn't do anything untoward at all. He thrust his way into the closest cable office to scorch a cable on its way to London.

IRISH found out that people were now looking at him and he squirmed uncomfortably. Uneasily he edged down off the pedestal and, with a casual attempt to whistle, sauntered up the block. But as soon as he cleared the fringes of the crowd, he broke into a run, going north with all the power of which he was capable. Evidently people didn't understand that he had any real connection with the event, for, far behind him, they were all agreeing that it was probably some advertising stunt.

Gradually Irish slowed down, becoming conscious of the fact that, for some time, loud and joyous laughter had been ringing in his head. And it came to

him with a start that Machine-gun and the *senator* were the sources of the merriment.

"Hey!" said Irish, coming to a halt. "Am I goin' nuts or what? Did I or didn't I put you into a statue?"

"It," came the agonized voice, "it was *Monty*." And the senator exploded into another guffaw, heartily seconded by Machine-gun.

"Monty?" blinked Irish. "But—"

"I pushed him!" chortled Machine-gun. "Didn't you get it?"

"No," said Irish, annoyed at being left out.

"Why, geez," said Machine-gun, suppressing his mirth, "it was as plain as the nose on yer face. He was agin' everything in this country, see? So while you was in the apartment with Martha, we cooked up the gag. An' . . . an' did you hear him?"

" 'B-bally pirate!' " bellowed the senator explosively.

Irish was too concerned with more important matters, such as a good rest and a good meal, to see very much mirth in it. But, as he went along, he did "fawncy" the idea of Monty trying to explain to his family just how it was that he had come back to life the image of one George Washington. But his amusement was short-lived, for the senator soon recovered, doubtlessly chilled into soberness by his present state.

"Just a moment, my good friend Irish. I would suggest that you edge back to Fifth Avenue."

"Why?" said Irish, his feet up to the melting point. "We just came down it."

"Monty's fate wasn't all I discovered while you were in that apartment," said the senator. "You see, my young friend Irish, it . . . ah . . . might be slightly embarrassing if I came back to life in any way . . . well . . . *harumph* . . . recognizable as myself."

"Don't keep coughin' about it," urged Machine-gun. "There's plenty of gents that got away with more here than you did, cousin."

"Well . . . *erumph* . . . I suppose that is true. However, be that as it may, I have made my decision. Between Fourth and Fifth, three blocks north of here, there is a place where, I must insist, we will stop. I have no liking for returning to life penniless and friendless."

"What are y' talkin' about?" said Irish.

"There was a copy of today's paper in the hall," said the senator. "Proceed, my young friend Irish."

XI.

SHORTLY, Irish found himself approaching a cluster of people who stood before a dignified small building in deep silence. No noise of the thoroughfares reached this place and there was a solemnity in the air which even made Machine-gun forget about the fate of poor Monty. There hung over everything the sickish smell of lilies of the valley, counterfeited and saturated, the odor so dear to the undertakers for its ability to completely mask less satisfactory smells.

And it took no expert observer to make the discovery that this was an undertaking parlor, for there in front stood a string of million-dollar limousines and all about the hearse were Mr. and Mrs. Million-bucks in million-dollar mourning. Even the chauffeurs looked contrite, which fact in itself bespoke a very grand funeral indeed.

Irish came to a stop. While he never felt truly ill at ease in any company or surroundings, he did draw the line at barging in on a Four Hundred burying party.

He felt himself punched from behind, and so deep was his abstraction that when he turned and found no one, he felt his hair rise. But it was only the senator.

"Go right ahead, my young compatriot. The chapel carpet awaits your adventurous feet."

"The chapel!" said Irish. "Why, they wouldn't let me in there if I had a tank! Holy cats, but you guys get some funny ideas. Burst in on a Four Hundred funeral? Geez!"

"Good Irish," said the senator gently, "I am already apprised of all the facts. Edge closer to the crowd and listen."

Irish navigated past a society cameraman and was instantly thrust out of the way, narrowly averting a collision with two solemnly but expensively dressed women, who ran mostly to eyebrows and ice. But they noticed him not at all.

Another woman joined them, dabbing at her eyes with a fifty-dollar handkerchief. "He was such a good boy. Oh, how Leona and her set will miss him."

"So shall we all, Mrs. Stuffley, so shall we all," said another. "But I always told George that sooner or later this would happen. His father was far, far too harsh with him."

"Still," commented the third, "it *would* have been rather awkward having to introduce a French cigarette girl as Mrs. Folham-Price."

"Better that," wept the first, "than to see his poor face, once so handsome and gay, lying so still beneath the glass." And she broke forth with a Niagara of tears.

"There, there, we all feel the same way. Even his father repents. They say, when he found Charlie's note beside his poor, dead body in the garage, he said over and over, 'Oh, Charlie, if I had only—' "

"Hush," said the third. "Here comes poor Mr. Folham-Price."

Irish looked in the indicated direction and saw a man in deepest mourning, whose face might have been carved of granite, coming slowly toward them, eyes downcast and hands nervously plucking at his gold-headed cane.

"Is there anything I can do?" said Mrs. Stuffley in a sad voice.

"Oh . . . Mrs. Stuffley . . . good of you." He gazed at her for some little time without speaking, as though he wanted to say something but could not form the right words. "You . . . you don't think I drove him to it, do you, Mrs. Stuffley?"

"Oh, no, no, no," chorused all three.

"But the note he left. He . . . he was a good boy. A little wild . . . but that was his high spirit. Perhaps I gave him too much money, or perhaps I did not give him enough. I do not know. But he had too many things, Mrs. Stiffley. He never had to struggle for anything. I should have been a better father to him, Mrs. Stuffley. I should have given him my companionship instead of my bank account. I . . . I know I am really to blame."

He wandered away, his face downcast again, his hands nervous. And the three ladies looked after him in deepest distress.

"Come," said a familiar voice in Irish's ear. "Push through as though you had a message. Better still, take out a pad of paper and scribble on it as you go."

IRISH fumbled in his pockets and found the required articles, for he well knew from the pressure against his back that if he *didn't* go willingly he would go by force, which action would create a scene. His knees were shaking a little but he walked steadily enough. Up the steps, through the chapel door—with liles of the valley choking him—and down the long aisle.

He would have stopped then, for two young men scowled and blocked his way; but the pressure was against his back and so he snapped. "Press," and walked through them as though they had been shadows.

The silver casket lay before the altar,

Charlie Folham-Price yawned and sat up.. The congregation might have been glad to find him revived, but there was a certain restraint in their greeting, though not in their leaving.

almost buried in flowers. About it stood the dead young man's old school companions, spiritlessly awaiting their part in Charles Folham-Price's last journey. A gray-headed clergyman fumbled with his book and an organist held his hands in readiness above his keys.

Irish found himself deserted in the middle of the chapel, for all those present had taken their seats—every single one of the seats—and even now the dead man's father with his outriders was coming down the aisle. There was only one way out and that was straight up to the altar rail and through its gate—but all that was blocked with flowers, and Irish gradually became conscious of the fact that he was the target for numerous eyes.

He could not remain where he was and the dead man's father and companions were too thick to thread through. The situation required some quick thinking.

But, by this time, Irish had gotten so used to the awkward spots foisted upon him that he reacted as he would have a few days ago, hunger and weariness notwithstanding.

As though leading the old man to his seat, he marched ahead, putting away the pretense of the paper and pencil. The chairs reserved for the family and the old man were just ahead, but to pass them would put Irish directly under the casket.

On came Mr. Folham-Price. Irish stopped, turned, and very courteously made as if to help the party to their places. And it would have succeeded very well if he had been wearing the correct afternoon garments. As it was, Folham-Price focused upon him and, for a moment, found the energy for indignation.

"Who the devil are you?" he snapped.

Irish recoiled both from the tone and the painful vision of being thrown bodily forth, perhaps arrested and then—

"Jones!" said Folham-Price to his secretary. "Who is this fellow? Have him thrown out immediately."

The pallbearers perked up a trifle, and among them Irish was certain that he saw two ex-All-Americans. At the door two motorcycle cops came out of their statuesque poses and looked interestedly down the aisle. The spectators stopped dabbing their eyes and became highly expectant of excitement.

Jones, all of five feet tall, blinked uncertainly through his horn-rimmed glasses and waited so as to be very sure that the order had actually been given.

"Throw him out!" frothed Folham-Price, almost shoving a hole through the floor by vigorously pounding upon it with his cane.

Jones gave Irish a minute inspection from flaming topknot to dusty shoes and shuddered at a vision of the consequences to himself.

But Irish had not been idle. He sauntered casually away, looking like a boy passing a graveyard at midnight, and hoping violently and fatuously that the blue escorts wouldn't take action. He was wrong. The gentlemen in blue looked at each other, nodded, faced about and charged at Irish.

There was no mistaking their intentions. Irish whirled and flashed past a very relieved Jones. But now he was faced by six pallbearers who did not appear averse to sullying their purple gloves. The cops, so said his ears, were right behind him.

Irish was still hopeful. In a bound, hopeful of breaking through to the back door of the dais, he reached the steps. An expert foot tripped him and he caught at the altar. With a crash the hardwood toppled into the coffin glass, and before Irish could be clutched he spread his hands out to save himself. An invisible force was acting upon him. The gripped amulet went true to its goal, slapping against the face of the corpse.

The pallbearers arrived as one man

and laid ferocious hands upon the offender and would have borne him hence with swiftness had not there sounded the shrillest scream Irish had ever heard.

Mrs. Stuffley, to the fore, took one look at the coffin and fell back in a noisy faint.

The sound made one of the pallbearers glance around, and he, too, let out a gurgle of dismay. The others looked to see the cause, and they leaped back as though stung.

Charlie Folham-Price was sitting up, flexing his arms and looking somewhat foolish. "Let him go, fellows, and help me out of this."

There was a stampede for the door by the first few rows and another stampede to get a closer look by the back rows. But Charlie Folham-Price gave them no mind whatever and helped himself out of the box. He smiled guiltily toward his father and said: "'Lo, guv'ner."

The gentlemen of the press, inured to anything, saw Irish and a story at the same time. In a body they vaulted over the pews, waving cameras and notebooks, and Irish was the first to see their charge. Into his mind flashed the knowledge of what publicity would do to him, how it would enable the ghoul to find him, how it would let the police catch up with him, and decided to get thence in a hurry.

He sprang through the door at the back of the altar, raced down a flight of steps, sped through a room full of iceboxes, bolted down yet another flight and found himself in an alley. He made short work of the half block and brought up a few seconds later, deep in the protection of the four-o'clock throng on Fifth Avenue. Mopping his face and breathing hard, he staggered northward, muttering: "Never again! Never again!"

And Machine-gun snarled: "Yeah? An' how about *me*, cousin?"

XII.

THE problem of getting rid of his last, lone charge had seemed very simple up to now.

"But I thought you didn't want to be anything like we've seen," said Irish.

The air was vibrant with disgust. "Them t'ings! Hell, pal, wouldn't I look just too swell with flowers in my hair like them gents in the art gallery!"

"Well," said Irish doubtfully, "I guess it *wouldn't* do. But there were plenty that didn't have. How about those soldiers?"

"Ya, soldiers! Th' dumb punks go out and get bumped off wit'out makin' a cent for it. An' who wants to be yanked up for maybe desertion or somethin'?"

"Well, there's Sheridan," suggested Irish. "Nobody'd nail *him* for desertion. And he isn't such a bad-lookin' old geezer."

"You said it," complained Machine-gun. "Old! Why, if I was to be him I wouldn't have ten years left, and bulleeve me, cousin, I got a lot too many things to do to cash in my checks ten years from now."

"Let's see," said Irish thoughtfully as he paced along. "There's Garibaldi, now. He licked everybody in sight and then some."

"Yeah, sure. Yeah, maybe that ain't such a bad idea, now. I usedta hear my grandpap brag about Garibaldi. Where is he?"

"I think he's up in Central Park."

"O. K., pal. Maybe you've made a deal."

They continued on up Fifth in silence, and Irish felt as though a great load had been lifted from him. There wouldn't be any real trick in pulling down Garibaldi. And as soon as he did that he would be free! He—

The thought slowed him down. He had not the faintest idea of what he would do if he successfully completed

this task. The wise thing would be to put a thousand miles or so between himself and the ghoul, but a guy couldn't travel when his pockets were empty. Besides, he looked too seedy to be very hopeful about getting a job.

He sighed deeply. That would come in due time. Right now he would find Garibaldi.

"Hey!" yelped Machine-gun so suddently that Irish's heart power-dived into his boots.

"Wh-what's the matter?" said Irish, expecting the worst.

"Lookit," said Machine-gun.

And Irish looked and felt very, very ill.

They had stopped before the Fifth Avenue side of Rockefeller Center, and sharp-angled towers glittered high above them. The park in the gigantic square, spread coolly beyond this entrance, and in it strolled a few dozen people. But it was not the grandeur of Radio City's architecture which had stopped Machine-gun Frezoni. And it wasn't anyone on the walks within the square. The object in question, to Irish's intense dismay, was a gigantic bronze.

Atlas, looking fully as big as Atlas might have to be to support the world, was bowed by the hoops of his amillary sphere. His great muscles were bulging with power and his strong face was set with determination.

Atlas!

"Here," said Machine-gun with decision, "is where I get off."

Twice had Irish averted destruction for the city. He had been successful in keeping the Statue of Liberty upon her pedestal, and the Library lions still looked stonily smug at the hurrying bookworms. But a stalking giantess or even a roaring lion would be but casual things compared to an animated Atlas, savage with a sense of wrong, thirsting for vengeance and trained in all evil!

"No!" cried Irish. "You can't! I won't let you! You said you'd be Gar—"

"T'hell with him. He was a sissy alongside of this gent. Geez, de rats down on Foist are goin' to git the shock of their lives. An' I won't even leave mincemeat. C'mon, pal, swing that chunk of ice and let me get goin'!"

Irish started to run, clutching the amulet with all his might. But he felt a blow hard enough to be an automobile—but it wasn't. All alone, with nothing to strike at, he was borne to the pavement and held there in a steel grip while something tore at his hand.

In an instant the amulet shot upward, full six feet in the air, and Machine-gun's triumphant laughter shook Irish to the depths.

By itself the amulet swung along toward Atlas until it got to the base. Then, swiftly, it soared upward and clinked against the cold metal.

Irish found his wits and scrambled back. But he could not take his eyes from the enormous statue.

Atlas straightened slowly as though he had a crick in his back. He raised the sphere and inspected it. Then, with disgust, he hurled it to the pavement where it rolled with large, round sounds.

Atlas stretched. He yawned.

And three seconds later Fifth Avenue was jammed two blocks north and two blocks south.

Atlas tossed the amulet up in the air and caught it in his massive hand. He wound the band about his wrist—it went just once—and jumped down from the pedestal. The pavement shivered under his feet.

Atlas grinned as he looked toward Irish.

"S'long, kid."

"The amulet!" screamed Irish. "Come back with the amulet!"

Atlas grinned the broader. "I didn't tell you about it, kid, but all you gotta do is yell, 'To smoke!' and strike anything in sight and it's done." And he

struck the pedestal, which broke into a myriad of fragments, leaving only a column of vapor where it had stood. Atlas tossed and caught the amulet again. "See, kid? Now I gotta date down on Foist Avenue."

And, so saying, Atlas strode away, and for blocks all about, not a human being was to be found with the exception of Irish, who sat still on the curb, his head in his hands, and felt as if he was going to cry.

But he didn't. After a while he saw the necessity of leaving the place, for a police car could be heard wailing on its way. He took himself over to Sixth and south a few blocks, where traffic, unknowing, went on as usual.

IT WAS then that he conceived the error of his ways as regarded food and lodging. For, there all in black and white in that dingy store, he read, "Old Clothes Bought and Sold."

His stomach would not be denied and neither would his tortured feet, and so, presently, he was vending his coat to a dirty little man who sported a shiny skullcap and who said that two dollars was the best he could do.

Two dollars was a fortune, and Irish quickly shucked the garment and pocketed the bills. Certainly, now, everything would be on the upgrade. Certainly he could avoid the ghoul and get food and find some employment and resume his old, carefree existence. The charges had been but a passing phase in his existence, but now their annoyance was no more.

Feeling much better, he went back to the walk and stood there for a moment, trying to decide just where he would find the best food. It was a pleasant thought and he licked his chops.

However, he found it suddenly difficult to think about food and, for one in his condition, that was remarkable. He tried to force himself to think about food, but again he had no success.

Back in his head a phrase was forming. Dim as yet, but growing stronger, it was some little time before he could articulate it. And then he had it.

"Come to the Hotel Burton."

Yes, that was it.

A glazed look was in his eyes. A paralyzing cold had taken hold of him gradually, leaving him no mind to reason that when he had sold his coat he had also sold his rue unwittingly.

Like an automaton, Irish faced north. "Come to the Hotel Burton."

And Irish mechanically started upon his way, powerless to hold back, not even able to comprehend the doom which awaited him.

XIII.

JERRY, the mounty on post before the Hotel Burton, was leisurely inspecting Badger's valuable hoofs, when a casual glance up the street made him return his eyes to a person he saw there. He let go Badger's hoof and straightened with a puzzled frown. Surely he was seeing things, but b'gorrah, that certainly looked like Irish approaching.

Bestirring himself swiftly, so as to meet Irish before he came abreast of the foyer, Jerry planted himself on the walk.

"Sure, and what's happened to your good sense?" snapped Jerry. "Ain't it enough that I let yez off once? Phwhat in the noime of sivin devils do yez want back here?"

Irish had no more expression in his eye than there is in a poached egg. He sensed an obstruction before him and so stepped around it. Jerry, more puzzled than ever, skipped backward a pace to block the way again.

"Irish, me bhoy! Phwhat's got into yez? They'll throw yez into the street, and this time I'll have to run ye in!"

Irish stepped the other way, heading for the foyer. Jerry knew now that something was very, very wrong, and

he grabbed Irish's shoulder and hauled him back by force.

"I said for yez to stay out of there!" cried Jerry. "Are ye dhrunk?" And he peered into Irish's face with wonder, for all the youth's usual liveliness of expression was wholly missing. Jerry grew frightened. "Here, wait a minute. Sure and ye're a sick man, that I can see. Come along while I call an ambulance."

Suddenly Irish wrenched himself away and dashed into the foyer. The instant he found he was free he slowed down and proceeded at a listless shuffle, seeing nothing, feeling nothing, hearing only, "Come to the Hotel Burton."

The lobby spread before him—the familiar lobby with its afternoon crowd of tourists and after-matinée actors. Fred was at the baggage desk and Becky was waiting on a customer. Georgie was explaining to the new man, Ace, how things would never have been done this way at the Waldorf, and, all in all, the place was exactly as he had left it.

He experienced a slight awakening as a sleeper who turns restively. These sights were all known to him and friendly, and a slight smile tugged at his otherwise expressionless face. Weaving unsteadily, he continued to survey the room for several minutes while couples passed him in and out, and while Jerry stood first on one foot and then on the other in the street with the sense of disaster upon him.

Slowly Irish came more fully awake, and there returned to him a glimmer of memory which grew gradually and then abruptly flamed into the knowledge that this was the last place in the world where he should be!

What was he doing here?

He would have whirled and sped away had not a horrible sight met his eyes to freeze him to the spot.

There, standing by the potted palm to the right of the cigar counter, stood a thing in turban and djellaba whose awful eyes were fastened upon him and whose ghastly face was suffused with gloating satisfaction. The ghoul!

Irish fought at the cloud which was dropping over his wits. His muscles were playing him traitor, and, in spite of everything he could do to prevent it, he found himself pacing slowly toward his doom.

The all-yellow orbs burned deep into his soul and scorched out what little will remained.

FRED, at the baggage desk, saw him and jerked up his head in astonishment. Becky stopped counting out her change and her glance widened.

Irish felt the energy draining out of him. He reeled and clutched at the edge of the desk to steady himself. He had a feeling that he was falling down a long flight of stairs which he knew would have no bottom. The dark was softly silent around him. There was one brief moment of sensation as his cheek struck the floor, and then he knew that he ceased to be.

It was like pulling fly paper from his hands or crawling through molasses. And then it was terribly cold and a shrieking wind howled from nowhere.

In terror he looked down at his crumpled self, dead and growing cold upon the immaculate floor. Dead with one hand doubled under him and the other outstretched as though to grip a floating spar. Dead, with his tawny hair cascading down, somehow ghastly in its brilliance upon the ugly gray of the face.

He staggered back, and two men were between him and his corpse. The truth sank home to him and, wildly, he dashed forward through the shivering cold to fling himself down upon all that had been he. But his puny strength availed him nothing. All things were terribly heavy. He could not even stir the inert hand or pry up the half-closed eyelids. A madness took hold of him and he came erect to stare all about him as

though he could find relief in the crowded lobby where all men had stopped now and two women had fainted at the sight of the corpse.

He whirled and faced the ghoul, but he was unsteadied by Mr. Snide, who went straight through him. Snide picked up a limp hand and then pried open an eye. He looked as though he wanted to hold his nose.

"Get the house physician!" said Snide. "He's dead but that is the right thing to do. Throw something over it, captain. Good Lord, why did such a thing as this have to happen! We'll have six check-outs before six. As if I could ever expect any good out of *him!*"

"Shut yo' mouth!" said Becky, thrusting Snide away. "He . . . he's a good, dear boy and . . . we treated him like a beast! Fred! Get the doctor!"

She rubbed at the chilling wrists and then saw that people were tightly encircling them. "Get back!" she ordered in a voice broken with a sob. "Damn you, get back!"

The crowd stepped a pace farther away and Becky distraitly ran her fingers through the tawny hair. "Irish! Irish, honey. Don't . . . don't look that way. You'll be all right. The doctor will come in a minute and Ah won't let him hurt you. Irish! Irish! Oh . . . why can't they hurry! Irish, honey, you'll be all right in a minute. Look at me—"

The house physician pushed her aside. He had been eating dinner and he still had his napkin tucked under his vest. He shifted a mouthful of potatoes out of the way of his words and into his cheek and, after briefly touching the coatless chest and feeling the wrist only to let it plop back to the floor, he announced: "Dead. Looks like exhaustion and starvation. Somebody call the morgue." He got to his feet and walked casually back to the dining room to finish his dinner.

FRED and Georgie, at the irate order of Snide and despite the protestations of Becky, picked up the body and dumped it in the freight elevator to get it out of sight while Irish beat against them, all unavailing.

Becky walked slowly to her counter and seemed to have possession of herself until she reached it and then she bowed her head on her arms and began to weep.

Irish started toward her, calling her name, insanely trying to tell her that he was all right and driven the madder by the fact that she could not hear him. The awful wind was shaking him, and the whole lobby was spinning about him so that he wanted to cry out for both to stop.

"This way," said a heartless voice behind him.

He turned and saw the ghoul and had no more than recognized him before he strove to run away. But there was something holding him back so that, hard as he tried to run, he could not move at all.

"There is no use in that," said the ghoul. "I think you will find it better to follow me. If you do not do so at once—"

Irish did not do so, and a terrible oppression came over him. The bitter wind howled in his ears until he had to lean against it, but for all that he discovered that he had accompanied the ghoul into the elevator.

It was awful to see Bert standing there at the control, not three feet away, looking as mournful as ever a man could look, and not be seen by him at all! And Bert looked around at the ghoul and saw him, turban and cloak, clearly and wholly, although Irish stood squarely between them! Irish shivered from another cause than the wind. How awful it was to be nothing, dancing weightless in the air!

Bert looked as though he had something to say to the ghoul and was held

"The amulet!" the ghoul snarled. "Where is the star?"

back by the forbidding aspect of the fellow—even though Bert generally had no misgivings whatever in stating his opinions to one and all, general or bootblack.

They reached the thirteenth floor and Bert put his hand on the gate handle but did not swing it back to him, thus keeping the ghoul a prisoner for a moment.

"You . . . you wasn't very far away from him when . . . when he fell," Bert stated.

The ghoul's all-yellow eyes flickered dangerously and Irish yelled: "Look out! Oh, for the love of God, Bert, don't cross him! He'll get you, too!"

Bert heard nothing, but he shivered a little without relenting his determination to have an answer.

"Ah . . . yesss. That is true. You knew him, perhaps?"

Bert glowered. "You know well enough he worked here."

"Ah . . . yesss? A waiter, perhaps?"

"A bellhop. And he was the one that took you up to your room in the first place. There's somethin' mighty funny about this."

"Perhaps," said the ghoul softly, "you had better tell the police—that is, if you have any suspicions against anyone."

Bert's glare flickered away, unable to stand the awfulness of those pupilless orbs of yellow. He muttered something under his breath and flung back the gate and floor door. The ghoul gazed at him for several seconds and then stepped out, leaving Bert to mop at his face.

COMPLETELY powerless, Irish had to follow the ghoul to his room. The fellow seemed to have no slightest knowledge of his presence until they were inside and the chain was hooked up against any intruders.

The ghoul took off his white cloak, displaying a silk shirt and a leather belt full six inches in width on which a great brass buckle glittered and from which a dagger was suspended. On the cloak he placed his turban, displaying a totally hairless skull.

Irish shook terribly. This thing was nothing human. There was a whiteness about him which spoke of sun-bleached bone and there was no flesh upon him. When he smiled he looked more than ever like an animated corpse drained of all its grease and blood.

The ghoul sat down in a chair and, from the table, took a small box. He threw several black opium pills into his mouth and, replacing their container, leaned back, almost closing his eyes, somehow suggesting a feline waiting for its helpless prey to scramble away so that its sharp claws can rake it cruelly.

All that now was Irish quaked in the middle of the room, the shrieking wind beating upon him.

"And so," said the ghoul, as though he had been speaking all along, "you came back to him." He seemed to find this very funny and laughed silently for some little time. Abruptly sober, he fixed his horrible eyes on Irish once more. "Perhaps you came back to rob my trunk again. Ah . . . sooooo. Maybe that was it. You are here to steal some more jewels. Well, now, I am a very reasonable fellow. Yesss, yesss, yesss. Very reasonable. There is the trunk. So open it."

Irish stayed where he was.

"Open it!"

Irish could not help himself, though he knew he could make no impression upon anything, having walked through men and struck at them as he was now without their feeling a thing. He approached the trunk and touched the lid. Startling himself, he pulled it open.

"Ah . . . you are amazed that you can lift things? That is only my influence. Those others could lift things because I trained them so. It is not

usual. Now . . . look into the trunk."

Irish looked down and recoiled.

Some bare bones, still decked with ragged bits of meat, lay there, and among them two sightless eyes stared helplessly up at him.

"He was a fool and not worth retaining, else he would be here with you now. A street sweeper, I believe. Silly fellow." The ghoul gave a recollection wipe across his mouth. "You can get into the trunk, if you wish. I can speak with you just as well."

Irish stayed where he was, but when the ghoul looked at him he found he had no will to disobey. He was in the trunk.

"First," said the ghoul thoughtfully, "you came back and took six souls that I especially desired. Then you took my amulet, a thing of great power. We shall go about the business of collecting these items once more as soon as I have made a few simple preparations. The amulet was not upon your corpse. I would have seen it through your clothes. And as for the souls, they have somehow managed to escape even you. You are to answer me carefully now. Where is the amulet?"

Irish would not answer.

"Where is the amulet?"

Still Irish was silent.

CASUALLY the ghoul got to his feet. He reached behind the trunk and brought forth a long whip which had a peculiar glow as though it was alive.

"Other than this, no material thing can now affect you, my adventurous slave. But this—"

It screeched through the air and coiled agonizingly about Irish. The pain was exquisite, too great to permit him to cry out.

The ghoul stood back. "You will speak. Where is the amulet?" He let the whip curl like a live snake about his low boots.

Irish again could not help himself. As soon as he could talk he swiftly recounted what he had done with the souls and the amulet, and each time he showed the slightest sign of faltering, the whip smashed him once again.

"Ah," said the ghoul. "You were much more clever than I thought. Cleverness is never to be commended in a slave . . . no, I think not. As soon as I have no further need of you I shall destroy you utterly. Entirely too much nerve, adventurous one. A dangerous possession. Too much curiosity. A fatal talent."

He sat down in the chair once more and popped another black pill into his mouth. He thought for a long time and then stirred himself to face the trunk in which Irish crouched.

"But you are fortunate, even so," said the ghoul slowly. "Very fortunate. To tell you why would probably be quite beyond you." Once more he was silent, but after a little while, appeared to amend his decision.

"You have done me a great wrong. If I did not have to go forth and recover what is rightfully mine, I should never have saved the miserable fraction of you which now exists. It is not difficult, you understand, to damn the soul within the body forever. I possess such secrets. And it is not difficult—for me—to chain the soul for my own uses, as you can readily see. I have a need for those others. A need you have not the wit to appreciate. A stupid slave is useless. An intelligent but submissive slave is very difficult to find. There were very strange talents in those souls you so carelessly released.

"A beautiful woman is not a beautiful woman at all unless her soul is in agreement. I had two with very beautiful possibilities. And you let them go. Yesss, you let them go, foolishly failing to see how you could make them serve you. For that I know you are a fool.

Continued on page 144

DON'T DREAM

By DONALD WANDREI

DON'T DREAM

Gifted with mindless, mighty power—power obeying blindly any thought—DON'T DREAM!

By Donald Wandrei

Illustrated by Kramer

JOE HARRIS woke up with an explosion of light in his brain. He had a stuffed, groggy feeling, as though he'd eaten a roast ox, washed it down with a barrel of beer, and had a skyscraper collapse on him. The sensation puzzled him. He was rather thin and nervous, chronically tired. He'd never win any medals as a champion eater, and alcohol only made him sick. He hadn't taken a drink in months.

He blinked his eyes open, and the explosion of light gave way to the hazily luminous darkness overhead where New York's glow fogged the stars. The night was so hot and humid that he and Freda had moved the bedding out onto the fire escape.

He tried to drift off again, but only became more unpleasantly conscious of pajamas plastered to his back, a tugboat hooting on the North River, Freda breathing harshly.

Even by night he got no peace from her; she nagged when awake and she snored when asleep. A year of marriage had turned her into an endless buzz on his nerves. He wondered wearily how much longer he could stand it, and whether she would let him get free if he tried.

The tugboat continued its mournful wailing. A tugboat—tugboats—that might furnish the material for his next daily column. He'd have to talk to a few captains, find out how many tugboats worked the harbor, what the men earned, where they came from. Just plain statistics—he'd need something better, with more human interest—perhaps he could find the oldest captain in service and develop a few sidelights on the changing water front.

Too bad he had to do so much digging around, though; if only the column would write itself! He had a picture of it, "Hundreds of sailors have spent all their lives at sea, without once losing sight of the skyscrapers of Manhattan. These are the men of the tugboat fleet, men like Captain Amos Whangdoodle who, at eighty-six, is still on the job. The job means more than merely nudging great ocean liners into pier—"

A sound intruded on the column that was taking form in his mind. The sound came from inside the four-room apartment. It was a rhythmic, steady tapping or clicking, the sound of typwriter keys in action.

He listened with more annoyance than alarm, as he strove to concentrate on the column. He'd had these ideas before, half-awake in the middle of night, but unless he concentrated or jotted them down, he couldn't remember them by morning.

The typewriter continued its clatter.

He eased himself up to avoid waking Freda and started crawling through the open window. Unfortunately Freda turned over in her sleep and a loosely flung arm batted him. He gave a nervous start, lost his balance, and sprawled to the floor with a thump that banged his nose. Groping around in the dark-

ness he knocked a chair over and the chair came down hard on some previously sound toes.

Joe let out a yelp that had all the emotional intensity of a frustrated werewolf.

Freda snapped peevishly. "What do you think you're doing, Joe Harris? Stop banging around that way. You come back here and let a body sleep in peace."

Joe felt around for a table lamp and looked into the dresser mirror. His nose was beginning to swell, his toes were on fire.

Freda called: "Turn that light out! It shines in my eyes."

He doused the light and limped off to the kitchen.

Sipping a glass of milk, he wondered if a jury would acquit him if he committed a murder. Freda had been larger than he, a big, blond Svensky when he married her. She hadn't lost weight since. She couldn't, with her fondness for chocolates in the morning, bridge and cocktails all afternoon every afternoon. And taking it out on him every night. He'd never got quite straight what it was that she had to take out on him, except possibly the mistake of marrying him in the first place.

Wooooo—wooooo—wooooh! wailed a tugboat.

The tugboat reminded him of the column, but he couldn't remember a word of what he had intended writing. It reminded him also of the mysterious clatter of a typewriter.

He wandered into the living room and over to the bookcase-desk in a corner. There was a sheet of paper in his typewriter. On it he read:

"Hundreds of sailors have spent all their lives at sea, without once losing sight of the skyscrapers of Manhattan. These are the men of the tugboat fleet, men like Captain Amos Whangdoodle who, at eighty-six, is still on the job. The job means more than merely nudging great ocean liners into pier—"

Yes, that was it; word for word exactly as he had visualized the column in his mind—but what had he been going to follow up with? He paced the room with fingertips gently caressing his nose as though to restrain its ripening splendor. It began to come back to him. "New York couldn't have become the port that it is, without the tugboats. Today's ocean traffic couldn't exist and couldn't be handled without the tugboats—"

The typewriter burst into a furious staccato. He spun around with shattered nerves. The machine stopped clicking. He eyed the desk warily and stalked it, ready to run if some ugly little monster should pop out from under.

The sheet in the typewriter had moved up a few lines. The new sentences read:

"New York couldn't have become the port that it is, without the tugboats. Today's ocean traffic couldn't exist and couldn't be handled without the tugboats—"

It was a neat trick. It was the neatest trick he had ever accomplished: operating the machine by concentrating his thoughts on it. But he had no time to digest the fact or admire the feat.

Freda's voice broke him up again. She shrilled: "Joe Harris, stop that dreadful racket! I want to get some sleep."

HE hobbled slowly out toward the bedroom, everything driven from his mind except bloody thoughts of Freda. She'd never let him divorce her. He was too good a meal ticket. He earned only fifty a week now, but his column was beginning to be syndicated, and every new paper that ran it brought him another five-dollar raise.

He wondered how many murderers escaped. There must be quite a number of murders that were never detected.

Successful poisons; people pushed off high places on land, or boats on water; you could run a man down with a car and it would look like an accident.

But Freda was an amazon. He pictured himself strangling her, her frenzied struggles, collapse. It was a satisfying but hopeless image—she topped his five feet six by a good two inches, outweighed him by thirty pounds. Shooting would be safer, for him. But it was also messy; a hole in her temple, or forehead, or heart—probably the heart would be quickest and damage her appearance the least.

He felt better. He'd never have the courage to kill anything, and he knew it, but mental scenes of mayhem and manslaughter gave a fair balance to his outward frustrations. He straightened, walked with a less dejected stoop.

Freda might even become a sleepwalker. A somnambulist had to start sometime. She might get up and walk over the railing of the fire escape—

There was a sudden, sodden, horrible *blup* from the areaway five stories down.

Joe ran toward the open window, guided by a huge sign beyond a block of rooftops. The sign flashed, *Nerves Tense?* LET UP—" More rooftops stretched beyond it, and then an eighteen-story apartment building with lights in three windows, and west of it a wilderness of roofs to the Hudson.

Freda wasn't on the fire escape landing.

A rectangle of light issued from a window on the ground floor. A voice started babbling hysterically. He leaned over the guard rail and saw part of a figure lying in the rectangle of light—pajama-clad shoulders, wheat-yellow hair rippled on cement.

The iron sweated his palms. "Freda," he mumbled, swaying sickly, "Freda, I didn't mean it, why did you— Freda, come back!"

Something flung him against the building wall. He felt a quick rush of air, saw a shimmer of phosphorescence on the bedding.

Freda was lying there. She had come back. He wished she hadn't.

Strangling fingers had made deep, purplish bruises on her throat. She had holes in her heart, temple, forehead—if that dark spot *was* a hole over nearly unrecognizable features.

"No, Freda," he gibbered, "if you did it, you did it, you belong down there—"

A pale glimmer cocooned her and she was gone. He heard a sudden, sodden *blup* five stories below.

Somebody's scream blanked out as he fainted.

FOUR men occoupied a room in the Observation Ward at Bellevue Hospital. Joe Harris lay on the bed. The alienist, Fosterbrow, looking down at him, was a long one, bony and semi-bald, with a face like a starved vulture. Detective Henty, on the other side of the bed, hung a hard, square head on an equally hard, aggressive chin, now lowered toward his Adam's apple. Detective Smaltz, looking placid and philosophical, sat in a chair tilted against the wall. Smaltz was the biggest and most substantial of the four.

Henty asked, "Is he coming around?"

Fosterbrow said, "Hard to tell on these mixed cases. Seems to be shock-coma plus a blow on the head. He might wake up in a minute or a week. What'd he do?"

"Killed his wife." Henty mopped his streaming face. "Guess the heat got him. First he chokes her to death. Then he drills her twice in the head and once in the heart. Funny thing is, we didn't find a gun or any slugs. Then he heaves her off a fifth-floor fire escape.

"God, how he must've hated her," he said, marveling. "He wasn't satisfied with all that. He goes tearing down the fire escape, hauls the body all the way up again, and heaves it over a

second time. He must've run down and up like a monkey. Leastwise, nobody saw it happen."

Fosterbrow looked dubious. "It doesn't seem possible, for such a little man."

Smaltz called lazily, "Yeah. You can't never tell about these little guys. Get 'em riled and they turn into regular wild cats. You wouldn't think it to look at him, but he's one of these here human monsters, like in the papers."

The unconscious figure groaned, began threshing, and suddenly sat up.

Fosterbrow appraised him, said, "Wait outside for a few minutes, boys. I'll examine him to see he's all right."

Henty hesitated, gave in. "O. K., doc." He barged out with Smaltz.

The alienist had a gentle, soothing manner in spite of his forbidding appearance. He said, "You'll be all right now. Just relax, take it easy."

Joe stared at him wildly. "But where —what happened—"

"You fainted. You're in a hospital."

Joe sagged back, said with dull despair, "I remember. She's dead. I thought things would happen to her and they did." He twisted, clutching the alienist's arm. "Listen, doctor, they can't do anything to me, can they? It wasn't my fault, really. I didn't mean it. I never intended to kill anybody. It's just that something happened to me tonight, something got into me, and things I imagined came true just the way I imagined them. I can't explain it, I don't know how it works, but—" He looked pleadingly into Fosterbrow's eyes, and slowly sank back on the bed. "It's no use, you don't believe me."

"Of course I do. Now, you've had a bad shock. You'll feel better if you lie quiet and don't try to think about it just yet—"

Joe bolted up, muttering balefully, "You don't believe me. Well, damn it, I'll show you"—his voice rose in a hysterical shout—"I'll show you, I'll show you! You're standing right beside me but I've got a picture in my mind of you standing over there by the window—"

Fosterbrow was standing ten feet away flat against the window. He pulled out a handkerchief and mopped his forehead. He murmured, "Dear me, now what am I doing here?"

He walked to the bedside, mouthing, "Just relax, and you'll be all right—"

Joe glowered at him. "You still don't believe me? So help me, I'll keep on till you do!"

Dr. Fosterbrow was standing by the window again. His vulture features took on a sad, gloomy resignation. He started walking toward the bed, and almost reached it when—

He was back at the window. He started walking toward the bed, and almost reached it when—

He was back at the window. He started walking toward the bed, and almost reached it when—

He was back at the window. He stood there, rubbing his bony nose mournfully. He talked to himself. "Nervous breakdown. I knew it would happen if I didn't get a vacation soon. I'd better turn my work over to Peabody."

He started walking to the door, and when he had almost reached it—

He was back at the window.

He made the trip five times, and on the sixth his face puckered like a child about to cry from pure vexation.

"Believe me now?" said Joe, bouncing on the bed.

Dr. Fosterbrow didn't answer him. The desire to reach that door had become a mania, an obsession, a single, fixed idea. He wasn't conscious of anything else.

Joe felt sorry for him. Joe said wearily, "All right, doc, you can go now. If you won't believe me, I guess you just won't, and nobody can make you."

Fosterbrow reached the door and put his hand out as though he took it for

granted there were fifteen feet of thin air to traverse again. His hand grasped the knob, and he yanked the door open and lunged through.

He caromed against Smaltz and Henty who were talking to a husky orderly.

Smaltz said mildly, "Now, doc, take it easy. He all right in there?"

Fosterbrow said very clearly, and very bitterly, with glassy eyes: "Don't ask me. I say, to the hell with him."

Smaltz and Henty exchanged glances. Smaltz sounded aggrieved. "Now, doc, is that a way to talk? You can say, to hell with him, or the hell with him, but not to the hell with him. That ain't right."

"To the hell with him," Fosterbrow repeated. He started weaving down the corridor. "To the hell with him, to the hell with him—"

Henty jerked a finger at the orderly. "Better get him. Sounds like he's gone completely nuts."

The orderly hurried off.

SMALTZ hiked in on the heels of Henty, who hauled out a report book and asked: "Ready to talk?"

Joe Harris, still clad in the faded blue pajamas, was sitting on the edge of the bed. Henty had never seen a meeker, milder prisoner. Joe answered moodily, "Talk? What's the use? You're all like the fellow that just ran out. He wouldn't believe me and neither will you, so there's no use saying anything. Go away and let me alone."

Smaltz said reasonably: "Now, we couldn't do that. We gotta turn in a report, see? All we wanna know is, why'd you kill her?"

"I didn't! That is . . . I don't know . . . you see—" Joe fumbled lamely, and stopped.

Henty prodded him, "Go right on. That's a good start. What did you do with the gun?"

"There wasn't any gun."

"Well, whatever it was that made those holes. What did you use and where did you hide it?"

Joe shut his lips in a stubborn line. A mosquito droned through the iron grille of the window and settled on the back of his left hand. He made no effort to dislodge it.

Henty said: "So you won't talk?"

Joe concentrated on the mosquito, wished it was on the back of Henty's neck.

The insect vanished. Henty slapped himself suddenly, almost knocking himself out with a rabbit punch. "Damn mosquitoes."

Joe spoke quietly, "I put the mosquito there, on your neck. It was on the back of my hand, but I wished it off on you."

Smaltz sighed. "Kinda seems like everybody's gone nuts around here."

Joe insisted, "In my mind I see pictures of things happening, and right away they happen. That's the whole story. It explains Freda's fate—she's my wife . . . was, I mean . . . only I didn't know I could do it, until after it worked on her. That's how I found out."

Henty nodded, too mechanically, and jotted down a few lines. "Sure, sure. Well, I guess you'll be staying here for a while."

"Oh, no," said Joe. "I don't intend to stay cooped up here."

He stood up and Henty slapped him back on the bed.

Joe rubbed his chest gingerly. "I've had my toes banged up and my nose skinned and my head cracked, and now you wallop me. I'm tired of being pushed around. I wouldn't do this, matter of fact I hate to do it, but you need a lesson. Suppose you go butt your head against the wall—"

Henty dived clear across the room headfirst and whacked the wall like a sack of potatoes. He fell, lay inert for a moment, and began to push himself upright, dazed.

Smaltz clucked, *"Tsk, tsk,* is that a way to behave? You won't never get promoted, pulling such damn fool stunts. Hurt yourself?"

Henty lobbed his head to signify a shaky No.

JOE looked apologetic. "I hope he'll be all right. But you see how it is. I simply visualize something, and it happens—"

Smaltz said, "Funny thing about coincidences—"

"I did that! I made him butt the wall!"

Smaltz nodded affably. "Sure, sure, you and God. Well, they'll take good care of you here. Come on, Henty, let's shove off." He sauntered toward the door.

Joe slid his feet over the bedside again. "I'm not going—"

"You sure ain't." Smaltz wagged a warning finger. "Better behave or they're liable to pop a jacket on you."

Joe said, mildly, "Maybe I can help you out. You're going to make a report?"

"Henty is. My orders are to stick around. Don't get any funny notions—I'll be in the corridor."

"What station are you from?"

"Headquarters. Homicide." Smaltz spoke automatically, and added with an air of faint surprise, "Huh—no more questions, see? That's our business and—"

Joe looked at Henty, who was groggily rubbing the top of his pate. "He doesn't seem in very good shape. I'm worried about his getting to headquarters safely."

Henty sidled hastily to the door. "That's all right, don't you bother yourself thinking about me."

"Oh, but I must," said Joe. "You shouldn't be wandering around the way you are. Might hurt yourself. Tell you what I'll do, I'll give you some assistance. A real big boost. I see you standing by the main desk down at headquarters—"

A section of the wall blew out and a thousand other explosions blended in one sharp and diminishing crackle in the distance, like a whole pack of giant firecrackers exploding at once.

Henty vanished. The hole in the wall was roughly his outline. The same hole extended through a tenement across the street, and it continued, building after building, block after block, mile after mile, straight down to police headquarters. Along the entirety of that colossal tunnel howled a cyclonic wind, a shrieking blast that sucked with it a cloud of dust, plaster, fragments of brick, glass splinters.

The gigantic hole had ripped through apartments and warehouses, factories and fixtures. It had smashed gas and water pipes, floors and furniture and offices. It had pulverized everything in its path—bathtubs and wardrobes, radios and radiators, filing-cabinets and kitchen stoves. It clipped an entire row of desks and typewriters from an insurance office as neatly as it took safe and securities and ticker from a brokerage firm.

A momentary illusion of silence, silence only by contrast, followed the deafening concussion. Then the great noise subsided, and was succeeded by a growing, tumultous clamor, the crazy uproar of panic-shrill voices. Heads—hundreds of them—began to stud the length of the tunnel fantastically. The nearest ones looked toward Joe, and the farthest group peered into police headquarters.

Joe boggled at the Henty-shaped hole in the wall, the Henty-shaped burrow extending all the way to Centre Street. He mumbled dazedly, "I didn't know—I didn't mean it to happen that way—thought he'd just disappear from here and turn up down there—"

The prodigious feat hadn't fazed Detective Smaltz. Apparently nothing could disturb his philosophic calm. He

turned away from his scrutiny of the gutted hearts of buildings, and leisurely pulled out his service revolver. There was a benign, almost paternal, gleam in his eyes.

He said, "That's powerful stuff you got, whatever it is. I never seen nothing like it. I bet there ain't any other guys in the world could do the same, leastwise not me. I'm just a plain, ordinary dick, and I couldn't come up to that in a million years.

"Well, long as I can't start a thing like that, maybe I can stop it. I suppose they'll break me for this. Might even send me to the chair. Here goes my future, and it's gonna be tough on the wife and kids, but somehow I just don't seem to give a damn."

He aimed the revolver at Joe and fired.

Joe stuttered, "No—don't—the ceiling—"

Detective Smaltz's outstretched arm jerked straight up, and he emptied the revolver into the ceiling. A pained look finally broke down his placidity. "Now, wasn't that a dumb play?"

"Let's walk out of here," said Joe. "They'll need you outside—you know, the crowds and excitement—"

"Sure," agreed Smaltz. His eyes mirrored his internal resistance, but Joe was too much for him. "Sure, come along, we'll go out there."

THEY went along the corridor, Smaltz ponderously on his numbers 10's, Joe pattering in his bare feet. There was a guard for the wing containing the psychopathic ward. Joe took his attention off Smaltz and concentrated on the guard.

He promptly learned something else about the extent and limitations of his strange power. The guard passed them. But Smaltz growled, "Make a monkey out of me, hey?" He whirled and swung instantly, so fast that his big fist missed the chin and raked Joe's cheek. Joe staggered and got his mind back on Smaltz.

Smaltz, arm raised for a second punch, lowered the fist at Joe's mental command. But now the guard was released.

The guard growled, "Get back, you, and don't try anything or I'll—"

A voice cut in from behind him. The voice shook with emotion. It belonged to Dr. Fosterbrow, who was hurrying out with his hat jammed askew. "You have my permission to pass that . . . that—" He waggled a finger and shouted, "Get him out of here! Get him out of here!" over and over like a phonograph record stuck in a groove. His eyes were as glassy as before, but one of them had developed a nervous tic of the lid.

Detective Smaltz and Joe Harris walked out.

On the street, Joe said, "You'd better go over there and help." Smaltz nodded and moved on to the swelling crowd that milled and babbled below the Henty-shaped tunnel.

The time was nearly seven a. m. Other people had run out in their night clothes. Joe could get by in his pajamas all along the route of the tunnel.

He walked to Fourteenth Street amid an ever-increasing uproar of fire engines, ambulance and police sirens, and emergency crews from the public utilities. The crowds grew thicker and thicker. His feet got stepped on. The cement already felt uncomfortably warm from the rising sun, his soles picked up the nasty variety of débris and refuse and animal traces which coat the streets and sidewalks of New York.

He found a store with windows full of men's furnishings on display. He decided on the selections that looked as if they would fit him. A fat man with mean little eyes and a ridiculously small shoe-button nose kept watching him while loitering at a bus stop.

Joe stepped back to the curb and had

a vision of the windows shattering. The glass crackled, showered, after the briefest of ghostly-blue radiance enveloped it. He darted to the showcases and grabbed white buckskin shoes, a white Palm Beach suit, socks, tie, shorts, and a basketweave shirt.

He started to scurry off. The fat man looked longingly at the windows, at other pedestrians, and began bellowing, "Stop thief, stop thief, stop thief!"

A couple of men took after Joe. Joe thought, "The fat slob is going to grab an armful, and then he's going to—"

The fat man ran to the window and swooped up a load. Then he stood, rooted to the spot, roaring: "This way, this way. I'm a thief! I'm a thief." He couldn't help it. His jowls quivered with rage and mortification. The two runners abandoned Joe and went charging down on the fat man. A policeman's whistle shrilled out.

Joe ducked around the corner, found a truck parked, and climbed into the cab. He had the shorts on when the policeman made the turn. Joe concentrated on him, and the bluecoat reversed himself, sprinting back along the route he had just traveled.

AT seven o'clock that morning, Joe had dreamed of inheriting the earth. By ten o'clock, he had reached the conclusion that he possessed a wild and diabolically useless talent. He want to get rid of it, but had not the slightest idea of how to do so.

He was sitting, in his ill-fitting clothes, on a bench in Union Square. He had decided that the safest place for him was in the midst of the largest possible crowd; and it seemed that all New York was pouring into the district. Traffic had come to a complete standstill. Streets and parks were jammed. Police had begun to rope off the entire area, but hadn't yet made an inroad in clearing out the central throng. Sirens kept up an endless wail.

A general alarm had gone out over the eight-state teletype system. Joe Harris was described as a homicidal maniac whom it would be wise to shoot first and ask no questions afterward.

Joe figured glumly that he didn't have very many hours of life remaining. He could cope with any single cop or detective, but the danger lay in his being shot from behind before he knew it, or encountering a squad of police. While he concentrated on one of them, the others would be perforating him.

He had slouched on the bench for a long time before he became aware of the woman sitting next to him. She was shabbily dressed, and looked half-starved and completely defeated.

She said, "Could I mooch a cigarette, mister?"

Joe, with eloquent silence, turned all his pockets inside out. They contained not a copper, not a cigarette, not a scrap of anything.

She handed him the remains of somebody's discarded paper. "Not much in the want ads. I used my last nickel riding the subways last night—"

Joe pushed his hands deep into the emptinesses of his pockets. He felt personally responsible for the plight of that woman whom he'd never seen before and very likely would never meet again. His luck was running out. All his life he had made it a rule never to pass a beggar, never to refuse a down-and-outer. It was his only superstition, and if it had not noticeably improved his luck, the habit at least had brought him no misfortune.

In the crowd milling past he saw a well-dressed man wearing a ring with a huge ruby. He was a citizen of portly build and prosperous appearance, with an adequacy of chins. He looked as though he carried a roll or a fat wallet. Joe vaguely wished that the stranger would come over to the woman and give her a stake. Even if only alms-by-

proxy, he thought it might keep his record straight.

Joe blinked. The stranger gritted his teeth and put up a terrific battle against invisible powers. He sidled toward the woman with all the verve of a pig on the way to a slaughterhouse. He pulled out a wallet and reluctantly passed a ten-dollar bill to the woman. He glowered at her ferociously, and the veins in his neck swelled purple, until Joe hastily willed him to lose himself in the crowd, whereupon he marched away muttering.

The woman started crying.

JOE got up and moved off. He couldn't stand tears. Even the lady with the live locks could have turned him into mush by a little judicious sobbing. Who was that woman of the snake hair, some creature that he dimly remembered from mythology? Oh, yes, Medusa.

A crop of gooseflesh suddenly blossomed along his arms and neck. He felt the eddy of a cold, immortal wind, and upon him the intensity of passionless implacable eyes. The impulse to look aside, to turn around, was overwhelming, but he resisted it, while beads of sweat popped out of his stewing pores.

He heard a peculiar *yip*, a human voice rising in a cry that was abruptly silenced. Joe heard it as from afar, for he concentrated as fast and as hard as he could on returning Medusa to whatever realm she belonged in.

The picture in his mind that summoned her, and the command that whisked her away, occupied mere seconds. Then the chill of apocalyptic air faded, and Joe felt released from some cosmic evil. At the same time an incoherent staccato of voices burst into bedlam all around him.

There had been an orator on a soap box bedeviling the air in plea of this or that ism. He was still on the soap box, arm upraised in a gesture of defiance; and there it would remain till doomsday, and his eyes would always stare stonily over the heads of the crowd at something he had seen, for he had turned into marble.

Apparently no one else had seen the apparition, the return of the goddess with magic locks. No one, that is, except a dachshund waddling along at the hem of its mistress. The dachshund had gone to sniff, and its incipient bark was frozen for all time in lifelike stone.

Joe headed for Fifth Avenue. He blanked his mind of everything except figures and multiplication tables. One and one are two; two times two are four; the square root of three hundred; if A is half as old as B, and B raises forty bushels of wheat on two acres of C's land, and C has borrowed $20 from D, who is the son of A—

Abstractions were safe. As long as he thought of algebraic signs, and symbols that had never had animate life or objective existence, nothing happened. They couldn't be projected, like Henty or Medusa, into life and extensions of life.

Joe wanted to be alone. He was trying to get away to any remote spot where it wouldn't matter what he thought, and where he wouldn't upset the lives of other people. He hurried along, desperately muddled in the wilds of mathematics, and not very attentive to the persons he jostled and caromed from, until he encountered a horse's flank.

The flank was a sleek, black one. It belonged to a spirited nag. The nag was directed by a mounty. And the mounty had as his immediate purpose the forcing back to the sidewalk of any and all who tried to leave the curb.

Joe tried, absent-mindedly. The horse's flank pushed him and the mounty's billy bopped him on the shoulder and a surly voice growled, "Back up there, back up, keep in line—"

The sting of his shoulder brought an automatic response from Joe. He looked at the mounty. The copper had a fish-

face, the face of a cod with the soul of Napoleon.

"Brass buttons and a billy," said Joe.

"Back up, back up!" The mounty crowded him.

Joe blurted, "It's only the uniform! You'l be a hell of a sight in your birthday clothes. Worse'n Godiva—why, we'd laugh at you and—"

A blue flash zipped over the trooper. His uniform, cartridge-belt, service revolver, all pelted the gutter. He strode the nag, bald as a babe except for the billy on a thong at his wrist. The stick whistled and bounced off Joe's skull. He staggered away in a ferment of stars.

A titter rippled through the crowd, and jeers, and caustic laughter. The mounty went galloping off. Joe saw him in a haze. The swipe of the billy had further addled his senses. But he saw the mole on the mounty's shoulder, and how nakedly ridiculous he looked as he jogged on the humiliating path to his precinct station.

JOE flung himself down on a bed of pine needles on a lonely Jersey hillside. He had been deposited there by a Chicago-bound bus which he had hailed on Eighth Avenue. The driver hadn't intended to stop at Joe's hail, but he did. He had intended to demand a ticket, but he didn't. And he hadn't intended to let Joe off on a secluded stretch in the midst of nowhere, but he did.

Joe was learning that his strange new power had one immensely useful by-product: it obviated the need of cash.

As nearly as he could think it through, now that all thinking was a hazard for him, his wild talent of projection operated in two forms or extensions. He could impose his will on any living person or creature, but only on one at a time. He couldn't blanket all humanity, or even a group; it took his full powers of concentration to direct one man.

The second part was that he'd tapped the source of the apparently unlimited energy or power that caused such results as *poltergeist* phenomena. Called into play, the energy was visible as a bluish glow or glimmer. He had seen it around Freda, had watched it hammer the plateglass window. He could move physical objects by mental command, and thus far had found no limits to the feats he could accomplish.

He learned something else from the paper, a morning extra, given to him by the woman on the bench in Union Square. He had not killed Detective Henty, as he thought. The hyper-energy enveloped Henty in a shell or cocoon. It punched a tunnel through miles of building, but at the same time gave Henty a protective screen, and deposited him unharmed at police headquarters.

According to witnesses, there had been an explosion and a shower of débris that bruised an officer, but that was all, and there was Henty. A hurtling human projectile, he had done all the damage but emerged without injury.

The same energy had operated Joe's typewriter, and been responsible for Freda's fate. It had produced the weird effects that shattered the equilibrium of Dr. Fosterbrow.

It was a marvelous talent, but so far it hadn't done Joe much good, because he couldn't control it. He couldn't simply decide that something should happen, and then watch it happen. The process was automatic. The moment a picture-action or wish-command flashed across his thoughts, it was translated into action. And, like all mortals, Joe was subject to idle whims and daydreams. No human mind can concentrate for more than a few minutes; he was no exception; and while he could channel his thoughts successfully for varying periods, the instant his fancy wandered all sorts of astonishing and unpredictable events ensued.

He had another object lesson as he was scanning the paper. His eyes lighted

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on an item concerning a large gold consignment being unloaded from an ocean liner. Quite unintentionally Joe visualized a box of gold bars, and thought how wonderful it would be to own one of those precious crates.

With an eardrum-splitting clap of thunder and a bluish haze, a box of gold bars deposited itself next to Joe. The wind of its passage fanned his face like a gale.

He had pictured the box at its pier, and seen it beside him, in fancy; and, instantly, there it was. It proved to be altogether useless: he had no tools with which to pry off the solid wooden casing, and the box was entirely too heavy for him to budge. He could have summoned tools; but, under Federal laws, the gold would do him no earthly good. In the end he wished the metal away again, and it vanished by the queer route of teleportation.

Of all the potentialities at his command, the one that disturbed him most was the resurrection of Medusa. He could do more than transport human beings; he could project the goddesses of legend. Apparently there was nothing to stop him from incarnating any creature of mythology, any spirit that had ever haunted the dreams of man. He could safely think of the possibilities so long as he confined them to negative terms. "I do *not* want to see the one-eyed Cyclops. I will *not* have Titania and Ygdrasil and Bubastis frolicking around me. I am perfectly content to let Merlin remain wherever he is—"

For the most dangerous part of his talent was not that he could bring Medusa to life, but that Medusa came equipped with all her sorcery; and if he should project any other god or goddess or creature or evil spirit, that being would undoubtedly spring forth with the full power of original magic and special functions unimpaired.

With this unhappy prospect drowsing through his head, Joe slid off into slumber under the shade of a pine.

HE dreamed he was astride a great black stallion charging at a furious gallop along a tortuous path cut from the precipices of a colossal mountain range. With ringing hoofs the steed charged around a sharp bend. The path ended abruptly and the stallion toppled over, falling for miles. Joe followed, tumbling at its heels. The stallion smote earth and bounced, and Joe dreamed that his falling body was cushioned by hitting the steed on the rebound.

Then he woke up, and found himself sprawled on the streets of a strange city at the base of towering mountains, on a great horse relaxing in death.

Stunned, he saw two guards in queer, golden greaves and crested helmets spring from the archway to a building of rose and green-veined marble.

They addressed him in a language of odd musical inflections, and rushed him inside. A great banquet, a victory celebration of some kind, a Lucullan feast was in progress. Many more of the golden-armored warriors lay around the hall in various stages of stupor.

A prodigiously fat man, like a caricature of Bacchus, appeared to be the king or leader. He was lolling with asthmatic wheezes and hiccups, surrounded by a dozen fawning girls. There was something eerie and alien and cruel about the women; they looked, in spite of an almost superhuman beauty, not quite human. Perhaps it was the effect of their supple arms which flowed with the ease and jointlessness of snakes' coils; or the pagan jewelry and cryptic, painted symbols that ornamented them in place of clothing. They spoke the same peculiar language of musical inflections as the guards.

The guards addressed the fat man. One of the women leaned over and whispered with a tigerish smile on her sensual lips. The bulbous ruler twisted a ring on his finger and one of the guards collapsed into a layer of rust-brown dust.

The fat man turned lazily toward Joe. Joe blurted, "No—no!" But the ring began to twist. Joe frantically wished himself back on the Jersey hillside—

A great vertigo overwhelmed him, the swoop of instant passage over unimaginable vistas, the fleeting of vast cosmic spaces.

Joe was standing on the pine-covered hill, a hundred yards from where he had fallen asleep. The diminishing rumble of thunder testified to the reality of his return from—where had he been? He had slept and dreamed; and his dreams had become projected into reality in accordance with his new talent; and he had awakened to the distortions of a dreamworld made real.

He leaned weakly against a tree with a feeling of panic. Till now he'd only worried about controlling his power while conscious and awake. Never again would he sleep in peace, for he dreamed constantly, often nightmares that were jumbles of illogical and unrelated things. To dream of them was bad enough; but to waken and find them vividly real—

A MOTORCYCLE *put-putted* down the road. Joe caught a glimpse of a state trooper and hastily ducked out of sight. He watched the trooper go by. As he watched, a perfectly foolish look began to spread over his features.

"He muttered to himself, "See here, Joe, you dope. What the dickens are you worrying about? You don't need to be afraid of the cops. You've forgotten your power—you can use it on the police commissioner. You can make him send out a new teletype order canceling the previous one. Why, you can impose your will on the coroner, and he'll certify that Freda died of heart failure, which is true, in a way. You can have Henty withdraw his charges against you.

"Or if you want to work it another way, you can just give yourself up, plead

guilty—and compel the governor to grant you a full pardon. It's as simple as that. And there's no use berating yourself for Freda's death. You didn't intend it, you wouldn't have wished it if you'd known your power. In fact, it was more or less necessary to make you realize the responsibility you now have."

Joe broke off, started whistling as he walked toward the highway. Part of his problem was solved. Now, if he could only devise some method of controlling his talent—the mental equivalent of a piece of string tied around a finger, something to keep him constantly reminded not to forget—he could turn his power to good use.

But that would be harder; he didn't see how it could be done at all.

While wrestling with the problem, he saw a car coming down the road, a farmer driving a milk truck to the city.

Joe's weary feet reminded him of nearer, more homely things. "I'll hitch a ride," he decided, "and see if I can think out something on the way." Picturing the truck driver stopping to pick him up was no effort; it was a foot-felt as well as heart-felt relief.

Moodily, he considered his problem. The truck stopped, the driver woodenly leaned out and stated, "Ya wanna ride."

"Thanks," sighed Joe, and eased himself onto the seat.

Wordlessly, the driver drove on—and suddenly started. He looked at Joe as though he had materialized from nothingness. He gulped, looked at the man beside him, opened his mouth slowly to say "Hey!" and closed it with a snap. His eyes stared down the road with feverish intensity.

Joe simply stared blankly ahead. "I wish," he groaned to himself, "I had some warning. I wish that, just before I was going to do something, a big gong-noise—something to really wake me up if I'm asleep—would go off. The way it is, I'd like to see the devil himself—ulp!"

Joe covered his ears with a gasp of astonishment. The gong-noise had lifted the top of his head two inches off his neck, it seemed. The painful expression faded in a look of relief from horror as he grasped the reason for the warning.

He noticed the truck driver staring at him. "Hey," said the driver, "do you do that often, or are you all through? If you ain't, this is your stop. And, anyhow, I've heard of guys with buzzes in their heads, but not gongs. I don't like it."

"N-n-no. Not of-often," said Joe. "Very un-often—I mean infrequently. No more—if I can help it. It hurts my head."

"I'm glad of that," said the driver sourly.

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FORSAKING ALL OTHERS

By LESTER DEL REY

FORSAKING ALL OTHERS

The dryads must live, for the forest lives forever—today as yesterday.

By Lester del Rey

EVERY Sunday, just as the sun touched the far hills, the tall young man came up the path from fishing. Sylva, the little oak dryad, had watched his comings and goings all during the summer, and now she crept out of her tree, glanced at the sun, and looked wistfully down the path that led to the brook.

He was on time again, his curly head and broad shoulders poking up over the summit of the hill, and she swayed toward him, while the old oak rustled gently above her in the still air. In supplication, she raised her hands toward the east and repeated her usual plea.

"Mother Goddess," she prayed, "make me be seen, this once. I have been dutiful to thy instructions, O Mother, and my tree has grown old and mighty in my care. The mortal has seen it, and rested under it, and the leaves tell me that he has found favor in its presence. Draw back the veil from his eyes and let me be visible to him."

A soft, sighing little wind wafted in from the east, stirring the green leaves of the oak, and she leaned back against the bole of her tree, willing herself to be seen. So intent was she that the sound of firm, light steps drew nearer and stopped behind her before she caught his presence.

"O Mother Ishtar," she whispered, "hear thy daughter, Sylva, and open his eyes to me."

But her prayers had already been answered. The bronzed young mortal had seen her and found the sight pleasing in his eyes, for he smiled with more than casual warmth in his greeting. "Hi, there. Where'd you come from?"

She caught breathlessly at her acorn necklace, and a light flush ran up her face. "I . . . I live here," she answered softly. "So long I've lived here, and so lonely! Could you . . . would you stop and talk with me a little while, and tell me of yourself? Tell me what your name is and where you go?"

"Whoa! Wait a minute!" His eyes ran over her lithe young figure, took in the youthful curves that showed above the brief line of a single garment, and ran up to her face. Then the elfin naïveté of her smile and the frankness of her eyes assured him, and he grinned again.

"You know, you're a funny kid. I *was* going home to supper, but I guess Mom won't care if I take half an hour more. The name's Paul Brandon."

"Mine's Sylva." She dropped down beside him on the mossy ground at the foot of the tree. "I don't know any men, but I like you—you're so nice. What does one say to men? Tell me about yourself, Paul."

He stared at her again, his eyes crinkling up in amusement. "You're doing all right," he answered. "Mind the pipe? Fine. Well, I'm pretty much ordinary, Sylva. See that little white

house down there where the highway enters the village? That's where I live, with Mom and Pete, my dog. When Dad died, I left college to take care of Mom. Winters I sell things in the store, summers I work the truck garden and Mom runs the roadside stand for tourists. Sundays I fish. That suit you?"

"Uh-huh." She dropped her head back in the crook of Paul's elbow and twisted over to face him. An odor of leather and tobacco blended with the comforting effluvium of masculinity, and her little nose wrinkled in appreciation of his nearness. This was nice, she decided.

"Your family around here?" he asked. "What're you doing, anyway—camping out?"

"I have no family. I just live here in this tree."

Paul tamped the ashes down in his pipe. "Orphan, eh? Sounds like you're hard up against it for a fact, sleeping in trees. If you'd like to come down, Mom might put you up. No? Well, have it your way. Maybe I could bring you up some food or something tomorrow night."

"No food." She wiggled her toes against his ankles in lazy comfort. "Just come."

"Wood sprite," he chuckled. She looked up sharply, and smiled again, her usual half-serious little smile, as she read only gentle mockery in his eyes. "Just a crazy little kid running wild. I'll bet you grew up on 'Peter Pan' and 'Babes in the Woods.' O. K., see you tomorrow, sprite."

"Tomorrow." She watched him gather up his tackle and waved at him as he turned down the path toward the little white house. Then she leaned back against her tree and hugged her knees gleefully.

A sharp voice broke in on her reverie. "Sucker! You've been playing with fire, Sister Sylva, and you're burned!"

She swung about quickly and found Verda, the pine dryad, staring at her with hard eyes. Verda had lived in a pine tree located in one of the mortal villages once, and she regarded herself as superior to the unsophisticated dryads here in the grove. There were even rumors of an affair with a mortal poet, until the townspeople burned the pine.

Sylva shrank back before the other's scorn. "I was only talking to him," she protested. "He's so strong and young, not like those horrid mortals with axes who come and kill our homes."

"And so handsome," Verda mocked. "You'd like to be a mortal yourself, wouldn't you? Like to go down there and live in a . . . in a house, actually, and have children, and cook for him! And watch him grow old, and his hair and teeth fall out, while his skin puckered up like an apple left too long on the tree. Let the mortals alone, Sylva!"

"But you . . . I mean, I've heard—"

"That I tried it once. I did." Verda's eyes were less hard now, and she came over beside Sylva, dropping her hand on her sister's shoulder. When she spoke again, her voice was soft and almost pitying.

"It's hard, little one. But you must forget him. Mother Ishtar made me tell the boy I worshiped that I was only a dryad, and he finally believed me. After that—" She shrugged. "Let the man alone, Sylva. That way lies only misery and heartbreak, cheap regrets, and bitter wounds. Better to mate with a faun than a human, and better yet to remain true to your tree. Go to sleep, little one, and think no more of mortals."

But Sylva did not obey; she sat with her back to the bole of the oak, staring down the valley toward a light that gleamed in the little house where he was, wondering and wishing, not know-

ing for what she wished. Finally the light blinked out, and a cloud over the moon covered the house from view. She sighed again, and stepped into her tree.

IT WAS Sunday again, and this day he had not gone fishing. Now, as the sun edged stealthily toward the shelter of the hills in the west, Paul gathered the remains of his lunch together, and tucked the bundle under his head for a pillow, motioning Sylva down beside him. She dropped willingly into the shelter of his arm, and sniffed at the wisp of tobacco smoke that strayed vagrantly toward her.

He broke the silence. "I wish you'd come down and put up with Mom. This living in trees and eating only fruits sounds romantic, but it's not the life for a girl. I have an awful time when Mom asks questions that I can't answer about you, and there are so darned many things I don't know."

She nuzzled against his shoulder, delaying what she knew must be done. "You told your mother about me, Paul dear? But she must have hated me."

"Not Mom. She told me you sounded like a cross between a baby and an angel, sprite. If you want to keep your past from Mom and me, we won't ask foolish questions; it's what you are that counts with us, and she'll take my judgment of you."

"Your mother must be wonderful." Sylva crossed her fingers and bit her lips, gathering courage to keep her promise to Verda. "You won't believe what I'm going to tell you, Paul, but you must know the truth. I'm not what I seem."

He grinned. "I won't believe you're anything but sweet and good, sprite. Nothing else matters much."

"Paul." Her voice was serious. She pulled him to her, hid her face on his shoulder. "That's just it. It does matter. You see, I'm not . . . well, I'm not like you. I never lived in a house; I never knew any humans until I met you, never went to school or did any of the things you talk about. I'm just what you called me; a sprite of the woods."

He looked down at her, pulling her face up; then seeing that she wanted to continue, he wisely refrained from interrupting. "I grew here, with this oak; all my life I've tended it, watching the acorns come in the fall, seeing that it was watered, that the leaves were clean, that no trouble should come to it. My whole life has centered here. When the autumn comes, I wear red and russet, gray in the winter, green in the spring and summer. Don't you see, I'm part of the tree.

"I never had a mother or father, Paul. No dryad has. That's reserved for mortals, and I'm not a mortal. Ishtar created me and gave me my duties, and all that I know was born in me. I'm something out of your storybooks, something that shouldn't be, according to the world you know. People don't believe in dryads any more." There, it was done. She clung to him, her body shaking with the effort of her confession, while she waited for the things Verda had hinted.

But he only held her firmly and smiled slowly. You believe that, don't you, honey? Then I won't laugh at you. But I don't believe it. Know what I think?"

She shook her head, and he went on. "I think you had trouble sometime, somewhere, and some shock that left you without your memory; amnesia, we call it. When you first became aware of yourself, you were here by the tree, and your mind fixed on some fairy tale you half-remembered. All this imaginary life of yours could become quite real to you, that way. Poor little sprite."

"But suppose what I said is true?"

"It isn't. And even if such things

could be, what difference would it make? You'd still be you. No, Sylva, if it pleases you, believe it." His pipe had gone out, and he paused to light it again. "Of course, I should take you to a doctor, in the hope that he might ferret out your trouble and find that lost past of yours. But I won't.

"If you had friends or relatives, they'd have traced you or gone to the papers and police; you couldn't have wandered far in your condition. So your past must have been as empty as your present, and I'm selfish enough to want you as you are. We'll let the past bury itself, and hope it never shows up—you might have had a husband who deserted you, or something."

"No, Paul." There was no use trying to convince him. In the mortal world everything had an explanation, and nothing could exist without one. Verda's mortal had been a poet, and poets are supposed to be credulous; Paul was practical in his beliefs.

"No," he agreed. "I can't see that in your past. And I suppose I'll have to let you stay here in this tree again. I thought so. For such a sweet little sprite, you're remarkably stubborn. I'll tell Mom about the amnesia so she won't ask questions when you come down to visit us Tuesday."

"Visit you?"

"Uh-huh. Mom figures it's about time she sees you, so she told me you were to come for lunch, at least, Tuesday."

"But I can't." There was fright in her eyes again. Paul chose to disregard it.

"You're coming. I'll tell Mom you agreed." His tone held absolute finality. "Mom doesn't bite, and she's a scrumptious cook. Which reminds me, it's time I went down to supper." He gathered up his possessions, and began brushing the moss off his jacket.

"You'll come tomorrow?"

"I'll come at the usual time."

She watched him go, and this time there was a haunted look on her face as she gazed on the little white house toward which his figure was moving; just so she might have looked on a jail. Verda, who had come to berate her and to learn the result of her confession, paused and turned silently away.

That night Sylva sat up long after the last light had been turned out in the house where he lived. Then she crept quietly into her tree without her usual words of good night to it. But it seemed to understand, for the leaves above were rustling a soothing little lullaby.

VERDA STOOD back and surveyed her handiwork with a critical eye. Sylva *was* pretty, no two ways about it, gowned in a hastily contrived dress that managed to cover her adequately. Paul had brought the materials from the village the day before, and the two dryads had worked on it half the night, adjusting and fitting it—work to which they were ill accustomed.

"You'll pass," Verda admitted grudgingly. "If you must make a fool of yourself, you might as well do a good job of it. Though what Mother Ishtar would think of your running off this way and visiting around with humans, I'd hate to guess. I never deserted my tree, and she almost refused to give me a new one when they burned the other."

Sylva's answer carried the determination of stubbornness which fears its own results. "But he wants me to go."

"So, of course you have to!" Verda's smile was as dry as her voice. "Mortal women don't jump and run at the call of men. They make the men do things for them, and then laugh behind their backs, calling the poor males fools and weaklings. What's to come of it all, Sylva? Go back to your tree and pray for the Mother to draw back the veil

over his eyes that he no longer may see you."

Sylva was watching the path. "He's coming," she whispered. "Oh, Verda, I'm scared! Suppose I fail? What if his mother should hate me? I never did this before, and everything will go wrong; I know it will! And I don't want him to be ashamed of me."

"Chin up, little one. You won't fail." Verda drew back to her pine. "If he isn't proud of you, I'll tear my tree up by the roots and throw it on him." She had reverted to her maternal mood, and her eyes sparkled fiercely. "You just show them, Sylva. You're too good for mortals, anyway. I'll try to take care of your tree as well as I can while you're gone."

Sylva glanced guiltily toward the oak, then caught her breath, set her lips firmly, and turned down the path toward him. Already she was farther from her tree than she had ever gone before, and she was still farther when she met him on the trail.

"I'm re-ready." She swallowed her heart twice, but it still came back to her throat.

His smile was gentle. "So I see, and very lovely. I fixed it with Mom for you to leave in an hour or so, since you don't want to stay long. Mom's going to love you."

"Suppose she can't see me? Maybe you're the only human who can."

"I thought we'd agreed to forget about that. Even suppose you are a sprite—which you're not—when she knows where to look for you, and what to see, you'd be visible, anyway. The dryads are invisible, according to what I could find out, only because of disbelief on our part."

She nodded glumly, and they completed the walk in silence. As the little white house drew nearer, her steps grew slower, and the voice within shouted for her to turn back while there was yet time. But they reached the flagstone walk, then the door, and he was greeting a little plump woman with streaks of white in her hair and a hint of a smile tucked in the corners of her eyes.

"Back so soon, son? But where—" She passed her hand over her eyes and looked again. "How stupid of me! There you are, of course, my dear. Come in. Paul, she's charming!"

"Meet the wood sprite, Mom." Under his banter, there was pride in both of them, and some of the fear left the little dryad. She hesitated at the threshold, fighting some unseen barrier. Then his hand found her arm and she was in the house, between hard walls and glazed windows that kept out the fresh winds that had been her tutors. Some of the fear returned, and she felt wilted, like a flower in the hot sun. But she shrugged, and it passed.

Pete, the dog, walked around her slowly, his hackles lifted. She reached out timidly to touch him; he sniffed her hand, relaxed, and wagged his tail, while Paul laughed. "Pete approves of you, too."

"Of course he does," Mom seconded. "Why shouldn't he?"

There was tea and fruit, and little cakes that Sylva tried gingerly, and found delicious. And there was light talk, while under it one could sense a series of barriers that dropped away and were forgotten. Mortal though they were, she found in them nothing to fear, and for Mom there could be only love. The tight closeness of the room thawed slowly to show the comfort that comes from that neatness which does not offend by being too strait-laced. Still, the hour was slow in passing, and she was glad when her feet were again on the path that led back to her tree.

"Mom likes you," Paul said content-

edly. "I knew she would. She told me before we left that she felt as if you were the daughter she'd wanted but couldn't have."

"She's sweet, your mother. I wish I were her daughter."

He hesitated for only a fraction of a second. "You could be, you know. Will you, honey?"

"You mean—"

"Yes."

The difference between them, which she had almost forgotten, came rushing back to her mind. "Paul dear, I couldn't." There was a tenseness under the words that he only partly sensed. "You're a mortal, and I'm not. Oh, I know you don't believe me; but I know."

"Angel sprite," he said gently, "does it matter, even if you are what you think? Surely you know what I think of you. And I've been hoping you felt the same."

"I do, Paul. But the children of such a cross are fauns, wilder even than I."

"You mean satyrs—half goat, half man? Curious; the mythology I've read didn't mention it that way." He brushed it out of his mind. "Well, then, we won't have children. See how simple it is."

It was her turn to be gentle. "No, dear one, it won't work. You laugh at my ideas, but underneath you're beginning to believe me. Such things never succeed."

They reached the tree, and he looked at it doubtfully. The leaves had hung down limply when he had first spied it from the path, but now they were rustling again in the wind. "Perhaps I do begin to believe, a little. But such things have happened before, back in the days of Greece. Don't answer now, but think it over. Tomorrow, your answer may be changed."

"Perhaps. If you find me here, I'll go with you; otherwise, it's best we see no more of each other." She turned her back hastily, and he went down the path and passed slowly beyond her hearing.

"Verda!" she called, tearing the dress off. As it came over her head, the other was beside her. "Verda, it's happened—happened to me!"

"I know, little one. Perhaps I've known it before this, but wouldn't stop fighting." Verda's arms were soft and soothing as she drew Sylva's head against her breast and stroked the silky hair. "We two were cast in the lot of fools, but at least you chose more worthily than I. And it's too late for fighting now; in this emotion, the mortal maids are stronger than we."

"But what can I do now?"

"Go to him, child. With him there may be yet some grains of happiness, but without, there can be none; that I know full well." The muscles on Verda's arms were bunched in long knots, but her hands were still gentle on the tired little brow. "But first, go to the grove. Perhaps Mother Ishtar may visit you, and she sometimes grants favors. Not without a price, since the gods barter rather than give."

THE CRESCENT of the moon was rising in the east as Sylva crept out of the thicker woods into the grove, and the little folk were busy at their labors. She passed to the center of the clearing that was there and seated herself before the boulder that bore a rough looped cross, etched in it by the passing of wind and water. She made no prayer, for a shred of outer knowledge told her that this rested on the whims of the gods, not on prayers.

Upon the rock there was a stronger gleam of moonlight, and as she watched, it thickened and became a halo above. A wisp of mist drew into it and slowly took form, and the birds nesting in the trees chirped sleepily. Before her eyes,

the shape became that of a woman, designed beyond the plan of flesh, and with a great soft light shining through it, as from some outer sphere. Above was a crescent of pearly nascence, and Sylva heard the faint murmurings of doves from a great distance. The dryad lowered her eyes and caught at the hem of transluscent drape that clothed the figure.

The voice she heard was low and soft, but there was a power to its infinite compassion that burned through the brain. "Nay, my daughter, wait. There is yet another who would come this night." Ishtar turned her head to the shadows that lay thick at the edge of the clearing, and her low voice seemed to ripple across the moonlit grass. "Come out, O Pan, father of all gods."

This time the shadows coalesced and became substance, and the moon fell on another figure that came dancing across the grass toward the goddess in the rhythm of a wild, yet stately, dance. Pan was caproid no more than anthropomorphic, and his figure seemed to shape itself at the pleasure of the wind. But the forest rocked to his steps, and the trees in the grove shook and rustled with the sound of a great flute. With a bound, he was beside Ishtar, gazing down from his red eyes at Sylva.

"Moon Mother, thou hast called, and I am come. Bid my handmaiden, thy daughter, arise and face our presence."

Sylva rose at a gesture from the goddess, and Ishtar began. "Sylva, little dryad, thou art come before the gods with troubled heart, and we see upon it the image of one who is not of thine. And it comes to us that there is a favor thou'dst have of us."

Sylva genuflected. "Surely the gods must know it. O Mother, give me a soul and let me become a mortal."

Pan's great bellow answered: "As to the soul, that lies beyond the gods. Each must grow and shape his own, and never find it finished."

"Aye." Ishtar inclined her head lightly. "As a mortal, thou'dst be bound to find the seed of thy soul within thee. It grows from thy thoughts, and is shaped before the smiles and frowns of others. As to the other matter, there is a price."

"I know, Mother. Give it to me, that I may pay."

The Mother shook her head. "One above us demands it, and only that one can reveal it; thou dost know that one as Time. But his price is as great as the gift, and perhaps greater. Remember, Sylva, that as a dryad or as a mortal, Pan's breath was upon thee as I shaped thee long ago. And whom Pan has breathed upon remains always of the wild. Still, if it is thy true desire, beyond all else, and forsaking all else, then that desire shall be a boon from us."

Sylva spoke surely. "It is my desire, Mother."

Ishtar's scepter of light stretched forth, and something filmy floated to it from the dryad and vanished; Pan's long arm reached out to her breast, and a little green amulet appeared in his hand. He spoke to Ishtar again, his goat face smiling with a queer tenderness.

"That which is of us is returned again unto us. Send her forth to rove among mortals and seek the soul she has asked of us."

Sylva bowed low and softly withdrew. But as she left, she could hear their voices, first the great rumble of Pan, behind her.

"Moon Mother, she is weak, and the gift we have given is heavy."

And Ishtar's voice followed. "Aye, Pan. Yet she is like her tree, the oak, strong and deep-rooted in the storm. Perhaps the price of our favor is not greater than she can pay." Then there came the low sound of the doves and

the piping of a wild dance, which faded away, and left Sylva standing beneath her tree.

But now the leaves drooped again, and her presence did not abate the doom of the tree. She was mortal. The wind that blew upon her no longer caressed, and the oak no longer was her home. She looked down at the little house in the village, and her sigh was long as its light blinked out.

THE SUN was barely up when Paul found her in the morning, standing with her back to the tree. He stopped to gaze eagerly, and laughed away his doubts of her humanness; plainly she was a girl, flesh and blood, and by her presence, promised as his. He sprang forward in great bounds toward her, a glad cry on his lips.

She checked it with a gesture. "Yes, Paul, I have chosen. But let us save our words till later. We can talk in your—in our home."

At his nod, she went quietly up to the oak and threw her arms about it; a faint murmur came from its leaves, and she kissed the wrinkled bark, patted the bole tenderly, and turned her back on it resolutely. Then she gave Paul her hand, and turned with him toward the village.

"I've told Mom to expect you," he said. "She has the preacher ready, and a few friends. I thought you'd prefer a quiet wedding at home, and Mom agreed."

Sylva smiled briefly. "You were sure of my answer, weren't you? I'm glad. And yet, I'm so ignorant of your ways. Perhaps my answer was wrong. But I will try—"

He pressed her hand lightly. "It was very right, wood sprite."

She wanted to turn back, to look behind; but that way there was only the past to see, and ahead lay the future. There was the white house, its neat yard, and behind it the truck garden. Below it was the roadside stand where

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she could help Mom run the business during the summer—the next summer.

And after that, perhaps, there would be boys to work in the garden with Paul, and girls to run to her and to Mom with their little troubles. Maybe in time, a mellow age, and certainly death. She had not thought of death when she had asked for mortality, and yet she was not sorry; as a creature of the wild, she had known it, and learned that it can be merciful more often than cruel.

The path twisted its way slowly down toward the house, and their steps dragged as they approached. Paul had caught her mood and was humoring her, though his desire was to rush onward toward the future.

At last they reached the gate, and she paused, gazing at the house. Again, the sense of being shut up away from the wind and the rain swept over her, and she saw only the walls standing guard against all the world that she had known. There would be only mortals in the life ahead, humans whose imagination, like the dwellers in the house, were guarded by firm-built walls that refused to let in any breath of whimsy that came from beyond their own little worlds.

And she would have to mix with them, to become one of them—was already one of them. She would have to check her thoughts, and turn to the new gods that they followed, for Ishtar and Pan, with Verda and her oak, lay far behind her.

Paul's voice broke in on her thoughts. "Angel sprite, are you quite sure you love me?"

She turned back then toward the woods on the hill. Up there, by the tree that had formed her life, she saw the form of Verda looking down, and the sister dryad was waving something at her. Then her eyes made out two other shapes near the tree, hanging suspended above the earth. Pan was there, for once standing quietly looking at her, and beside him was Ishtar. In benediction, the *crux ansata* in the goddess' hand stretched forth, then faded. As Sylva watched, the figures of Pan and the Mother disappeared, and Verda, too, was growing dim. Then there was only the dying tree, standing forsaken, its leaves wilted and drooping. And in her mind, the cool voice of Ishtar seemed to whisper faintly: "There is a price."

She knew the price now, such a price as only one born of the wild could know. But her voice was without a quaver, her hand steady in Paul's, and Sylva was facing the house with a little smile when she made answer to his question.

"Yes, my dear, quite sure. More sure than you can ever know."

TWO SOUGHT ADVENTURE

By FRITZ LEIBER, Jr.

TWO SOUGHT ADVENTURE

The message—very secret!—promised treasure! And gave—death!

By Fritz Leiber, Jr.

Illustrated by Isip

IT was the Year of the Behemoth, the Month of the Hedgehog, the Day of the Toad. A hot, late summer sun was sinking down toward evening over the somber, fertile land of Lankhmar, the most civilized country in a world which history forgets. Peasants toiling in the endless grain fields paused for a moment, and lifted their earth-stained faces, and noted that it would soon be time to commence lesser chores. Cattle cropping the stubble began to move in the general direction of home. Sweaty merchants and shopkeepers decided to wait a little longer before tasting the pleasures of the bath. Thieves and astrologers moved restlessly in their sleep, sensing that the hours of night and work were drawing near.

At the southernmost limit of the land of Lankhmar, a day's ride beyond the village of Soreev, where the grain fields gave way to rolling forests of maple and oak, two horsemen cantered leisurely along a narrow, dusty road. They presented a sharp contrast. The larger wore a tunic of unbleached linen, drawn tight at the waist by a very broad leather belt. A fold of linen cloak was looped over his head as a protection against the sun. A long sword with a pomegranate-shaped golden pommel was strapped to his side. Behind his right shoulder a quiver of arrows jutted up. Half sheathed in a saddlecase was a thick yew bow, unstrung. His great, lissom muscles, white skin, copper hair, green eyes, and above all the pleasant, yet untamed, expression of his massive countenance, all hinted at a land of origin colder, rougher, and more barbarous than that of Lankhmar.

Even as everything about the larger man suggested the wilderness, so the general appearance of the smaller man —and he was considerably smaller— spoke of the city. His dark face was that of a jester. Bright, black eyes, snub nose, and little lines of irony about the mouth. Hands of a conjurer. Something about the set of his wiry frame betokening exceptional competence in street fights and tavern brawls. He was clad from head to foot in garments of gray silk, soft, and curiously loose of weave. His slim sword, cased in gray mouse skin, was slightly curved toward the tip. From his belt hung a sling and a pouch of missiles.

Despite their many dissimilarities, it was obvious that the two men were comrades, that they were united by a bond of subtle mutual understanding. The smaller rode a dappled gray mare; the larger, a chestnut gelding.

They were nearing a point where the narrow road came to the end of a rise, made a slight turn, and wound down into the next valley. Green walls of leaves pressed in on either side. The heat was considerable, but not oppressive. It brought to mind thoughts of satyrs and centaurs dozing in hidden glades.

Then the gray mare, slightly in the lead, whinnied. The smaller man tight-

ened his hold on the reins, his black eyes darting quick, alert glances, first to one side of the road and then to the other. There was a faint scraping sound, as of wood on wood.

Without warning the two men ducked down, clinging to the side harness of their horses. Simultaneously came the musical twang of bowstrings, like the prelude of some forest concert, and several arrows buzzed angrily through the spaces that had just been vacated. Then the mare and the gelding were around the turn and galloping like the wind, their hoofs striking up great puffs of dust.

From behind came excited shouts and answers as the pursuit got under way. There seemed to have been fully seven or eight men in the ambuscade—squat, sturdy rogues wearing chain-mail shirts and steel caps. Before the mare and the gelding had gone a stone's throw down the road, they were out and after, a black horse in the lead.

BUT those pursued were not wasting time. The larger man rose to a stand in his stirrups, whipping the yew bow from its case. With his left hand he bent it against the stirrup, with his right he drew the upper loop of the string into place. Then his left hand slipped down the bow to the grip and his right reached smoothly back over his shoulder for an arrow. Still guiding his horse with his knees, he rose even higher and turned in his saddle—it was a sight for the gods—and sent an eagle-feathered shaft whirring. Meanwhile his comrade had placed a small leaden ball in his sling, whirled it twice about his head, so that it hummed stridently, and loosed his cast.

Arrow and missile sped and struck together. The one pierced the shoulder of the leading horseman and the other smote the second on his steel cap, and tumbled him from his saddle. The pursuit halted abruptly in a tangle of plunging and rearing horses. The men who had caused this confusion pulled up at the next bend in the road and turned back to watch.

"By the Hedgehog," said the smaller, grinning wickedly, "but they will think twice before they play at ambuscades again!"

"Blundering fools," said the larger. "Haven't they even learned to shoot from their saddles? I tell you, Gray Mouser, it takes a barbarian to fight his horse properly."

"Except for myself and a few other people," replied the one who bore the strangely appropriate nickname of Gray Mouser. "But look, Fafhrd, the rogues retreat bearing their wounded, and one gallops far ahead. *Tcha,* but I dinted black beard's pate for him. He hangs over his nag like a bag of meal. If he'd have known who we were, he wouldn't have been so hot on the chase."

There was some truth to this last boast. The names of the Gray Mouser and the northerner Fafhrd were already something to conjure with in the lands around Lankhmar and in proud Lankhmar, too. Their taste for strange adventure, their mysterious comings and goings, and their odd sense of humor were matters that puzzled almost all men alike.

Abruptly Fafhrd unstrung his bow and turned forward in his saddle.

"This should be the very valley we are seeking," he said. "See, there are the two double-humped hills of which the document speaks. Let's have another look at it, to test my guess."

The Gray Mouser reached into his capacious leather pouch and withdrew a page of thick vellum, which was curiously greenish with extreme age. Three edges were frayed and worn; the fourth showed a clean and recent cut. It was inscribed with the intricate hieroglyphs of Lankhmarian writing, done in the black ink of the squid. But it was not to these that the Mouser turned his at-

tention, but to several faint lines of diminutive red script, written into the margin. These he read.

"Let kings stack their treasure houses ceiling-high, and merchants burst their vaults with hoarded coin, and fools envy them. I have a treasure that outvalues theirs. A diamond as big as a man's skull. Twelve rubies each as big as the skull of a cat. Seventeen emeralds each as big as the skull of a mole. And certain rods of crystal and bars of orichalchum. Let overlords swagger jewel-bedecked and queens load themselves with gems, and fools adore them. I have a treasure that will outlast theirs. A treasure house have I builded for it in the far southern forest, where the two hills hump double, like sleeping camels, a day's ride beyond the village of Soreev.

"A great treasure house with a high tower, fit for a king's dwelling—yet no king may dwell there. Immediately below the keystone of the chief dome my treasure lies hid, eternal as the glittering stars. It will outlast me and my name, I, Urgaan of Angarngi. It is my hold on the future. Let fools seek it. They shall win it not. For although my treasure house be empty as air, yet have I left a guardian there. Let the wise read this riddle and forbear."

"The man's mind runs to skulls," muttered the Mouser. "He must have been a gravedigger or a necromancer."

"Or an architect," observed Fofhrd thoughtfully, "in those past days when graven images of the skulls of men and animals served as the chief architectural ornament."

"Perhaps," agreed the Mouser. "Surely the writing and ink are old enough. They date at least as far back as the Century of the Wars with the East—five long life-spans."

The Mouser was an accomplished forger, both of handwriting and of objects of art. He knew what he was talking about.

SATISFIED that they were near the goal of their quest, the two comrades gazed through a break in the foliage down into the valley. It was shaped like the inside of a pod—shallow, long, and narrow. They were viewing it from one of the narrow ends. The two peculiarly humped hills formed the long sides. The whole of the valley was green with maple and oak, save for a small gap toward the middle. That, thought the Mouser, might mark a peasant's dwelling and the cleared space around it.

Beyond the gap he could make out something dark and squarish rising a little above the treetops. He called his companion's attention to it, but they could not decide whether it was indeed a tower such as the document mentioned, or just a peculiar shadow, or perhaps even the dead, limbless trunk of a gigantic oak. It was too far away.

"Almost sufficient time has passed," said Fafhrd, after a pause, "for one of those rogues to have sneaked up through the forest for another shot at us. Evening draws near."

They spoke to their horses and moved on, slowly, as if not to disturb the arboreal quiet. They tried to keep their eyes fixed on the thing that looked like a tower, but since they were descending, it almost immediately dropped out of sight below the treetops. There would be no further chance of seeing it until they were quite close at hand.

The Mouser felt a subdued excitement running through his flesh. Soon they would discover if there were a treasure to be had or not. A diamond as big as a man's skull—rubies—emeralds— He found an almost nostalgic delight in prolonging and savoring to the full this last, leisurely stage of their quest. The recent ambuscade served as a necessary spice.

He thought of how he had slit the interesting-looking vellum page from the ancient book on architecture that reposed in the library of the rapacious and overbearing Lord Rannarsh. Of how, half in jest, he had sought out and

interrogated several peddlers from the South. Of how he had found one who had recently passed through a village named Soreev. Of how that one had told him of a stone structure in the forest south of Soreev, called by the peasants the House of Angarngi, and reputed to be long deserted. The peddler had seen a high tower rising above the trees. The Mouser recalled the man's wizened, cunning face and chuckled. And that brought to mind the greedy, sallow face of Lord Rannarsh, and a new thought occurred to him.

"Fafhrd," he said, "those rogues we just now put to flight—what did you take them for?"

The northerner grunted humorous contempt.

"Run-of-the-manger ruffians. Waylayers of fat merchants. Pasture bravos. Bumpkin bandits!"

"Still, they were all well armed, and armed alike—as if they were in some rich man's service. And that one who rode far ahead. Mightn't he have been hastening to report failure to some master?"

"What is your thought?"

The Mouser did not reply for some moments.

"I was thinking," he said, "that Lord Rannarsh is a rich man and a greedy one, who slavers at the thought of jewels. And I was wondering if he ever read those faint lines of red lettering and made a copy of them, and if my theft of the original sharpened his interest."

The northerner shook his head.

"I doubt it. You are oversubtle. But if he did, and if he seeks to rival us in this treasure quest, he'd best watch each step twice—and choose servitors who can fight on horseback."

They were moving so slowly that the hoofs of the mare and the gelding hardly stirred up the dust. They had no fear of danger from the rear. A well-laid ambuscade might surprise them, but not a man or horse in motion. The narrow road wound along in a rather purposeless fashion. Leaves brushed their faces, and occasionally they had to swing their bodies out of the way of encroaching branches. The ripe, dryish scent of the late summer forest was intensified now that they were below the rim of the valley. Mingled with it were whiffs of wild berries and aromatic shrubs. Shadows imperceptibly lengthened.

"Nine chances out of ten," murmured the Mouser dreamily, "the treasure house of Urgaan of Angarngi was looted some hundred years ago, by men whose bodies are already dust."

"It may be so," agreed Fafhrd. "Unlike men, rubies and emeralds do not rest quietly in their graves."

This possibility, which they had discussed several times before, did not disturb them now, or make them impatient. Rather did it impart to their quest the pleasant melancholy of a lost hope. They drank in the rich air and let their horses munch random mouthfuls of leaves. A jay called shrilly from overhead and off in the forest a catbird was chattering, their sharp voices breaking in on the low buzzing and droning of the insects. Night was drawning near. The almost-horizontal rays of the sun gilded the treetops. Then Fafhrd's sharp ears caught the hollow lowing of a cow.

A FEW MORE turns brought them into the clearing they had spied. In line with their surmise, it proved to contain a peasant's cottage—a neat little low-eaved house of weathered wood, situated in the midst of an acre of grain. To one side was a bean patch; to the other, a woodpile which almost dwarfed the house. In front of the cottage stood a wiry old man, his skin as brown as his homespun tunic. He had evidently just heard the horses and turned around to look.

"Ho, father," called the Mouser, "it's

a good day to be abroad in, and a good home you have here."

The peasant considered these statements and then nodded his head in agreement.

"We are two weary travelers," continued the Mouser.

Again the peasant nodded gravely.

"In return for two silver coins will you give us lodging for the night?"

The peasant rubbed his chin and then held up three fingers.

"Very well, you shall have three silver coins," said the Mouser, slipping from his horse. Fafhrd followed suit.

Only after giving the old man a coin to seal the bargain, did the Mouser question casually, "Is there not an old, deserted place near your dwelling called the House of Angarngi?"

The peasant nodded.

"What's it like?"

The peasant shrugged his shoulders.

"Don't you know?"

The peasant shook his head.

"But haven't you ever seen the place?" The Mouser's voice carried a note of amazement he did not bother to conceal.

He was answered by another headshake.

"But father, it's only a few minutes' walk from your dwelling, isn't it?"

The peasant nodded tranquilly, as if the whole business were very obvious and no matter for surprise.

A muscular young man, who had come from behind the cottage to take their horses, offered a suggestion.

"You can see tower from other side the house. I can point her out."

At this the old man proved he was not completely speechless by saying in a dry, expressionless voice: "Go ahead. Look at her all you want."

And he stepped into the cottage. Fafhrd and the Mouser caught a glimpse of a child peering around the door, an old woman stirring a pot, and someone hunched in a big chair before the tiny fire.

The upper part of the tower proved to be just barely visible through a break in the trees. The last rays of the sun touched it with deep red. It looked about four or five bowshots distant. And then, even as they watched, the sun dipped under and it became a featureless square of blackish stone.

"She's an old place," explained the young man vaguely. "I been all around her. Father, he's just never bothered to look."

"You've been inside?" questioned the Mouser.

The young man scratched his head doubtfully.

"No. She's just an old place. No good for anything."

"There'll be a fairly long twilight," said Fafhrd, his wide green eyes drawn to the tower as if by a lodestone. "Long enough for us to have a closer look."

"I'd show the way," said the young man, "save I got water to fetch."

"No matter," replied Fafhrd. "When's supper?"

"When first stars show."

THEY left him holding their horses and walked straight into the woods. Immediately it became much darker, as if twilight were almost over, rather than just begun. The vegetation proved to be somewhat thicker than they had anticipated. There were vines and thorns to be avoided. Irregular, pale patches of sky appeared and disappeared overhead.

The Mouser let Fafhrd lead the way. His mind was occupied with a queer sort of reverie about the peasants. It tickled his fancy to think how they had stolidly lived their toilsome lives, generation after generation, only a few steps from what might be one of the greatest treasure-troves in the world. It seemed an incredible contrast. How could people sleep so near jewels and

not dream of them? But probably they never dreamed.

So the Gray Mouser was sharply aware of few things during the journey through the woods, save that Fafhrd seemed to be taking a long time—which was strange, since the barbarian was an accomplished woodsman.

Finally a deeper and more solid shadow loomed up through the trees, and in a moment they were standing in the margin of a small, boulder-studded clearing, most of which was occupied by the bulky structure they sought. Abruptly, even before his eyes took in the details of the place, the Mouser's mind was filled with a hundred petty perturbations. Weren't they making a mistake in leaving their horses with those strange peasants? And mightn't those rogues have followed them to the cottage? And wasn't this the Day of the Toad, an unlucky day for entering deserted houses? And shouldn't they have a short spear along, in case they met a forest leopard? And wasn't that a whippoorwill he heard crying on his left hand, an augury of ill omen?

The treasure house of Urgaan of Angarngi was a peculiar structure. The main feature was a large, shallow dome, resting on walls that formed an octagon. In front, and merging into it, were two lesser domes. Between these gaped a great square doorway. The tower rose asymmetrically from the rear part of the chief dome. The eyes of the Mouser sought hurriedly through the dimming twilight for the cause of the salient peculiarity of the structure, and decided it lay in the utter simplicity. There were no pillars, no outjutting cornices, no friezes, no architectural ornaments of any sort, skull-embellished or otherwise. Save for the doorway and a few tiny windows set in unexpected places, the House of Angarngi was a compact mass of uniformly dark gray stones.

But now Fafhrd was striding up the short flight of terraced steps that led toward the open door, and the Mouser perforce followed him, although he would have liked to spy around a little longer. With every step he took forward he sensed an odd reluctance growing within him. His earlier mood of pleasant expectancy vanished as suddenly as if he'd stepped into quicksand. It seemed to him that the black doorway yawned like a toothless mouth. And then a little shudder went through him, for he saw the mouth had a tooth—a bit of ghostly white that jutted up from the floor. Fafhrd was reaching down toward the object.

"I wonder whose skull this may be?" said the northerner calmly.

The Mouser regarded the thing, and the scattering of bones and fragments of bone beside it. His feeling of uneasiness was fast growing toward a climax, and he had the unpleasant conviction that, once it did reach a climax, something would happen. What was the answer to Fafhrd's question? What form of death had struck down that earlier intruder? It was so dark inside the treasure house. Didn't the manuscript mention something about a guardian? It was hard to think of a flesh-and-blood guardian persisting for three hundred years, but there were things that were immortal or nearly immortal. He could tell that Fafhrd was not in the least affected by any premonitory disquietude, and was quite capable of instituting an immediate search for the treasure. That must be prevented at all costs. But how? He remembered that the northerner loathed snakes.

"This cold, damp stone," he observed casually. "Just the place for snakes."

"Nothing of the sort," replied Fafhrd angrily. "I'm willing to wager there's not a single serpent inside."

But a moment later he was agreeing it would be well to postpone the search until daylight returned, now that the treasure house was located.

As they re-entered the woods, the Mouser heard a little inner voice whispering to him, "Just in time. Just in time." Then the sense of uneasiness departed as suddenly as it had come, and he began to feel somewhat ridiculous. This caused him to sing a bawdy ballad of his own invention, wherein demons and other supernatural agents were ridiculed obscenely. Fafhrd chimed in good-naturedly on the choruses.

IT WAS NOT as dark as they expected when they reached the cottage. They saw to their horses, found they had been well cared for, and then fell to the savory mess of beans, porridge, and pot herbs that the peasant's wife ladled into oak bowls. Fresh milk to wash it down was provided in quaintly carved oak goblets. The meal was a satisfying one and the interior of the house was neat and clean, despite its stamped earthen floor and low beams, which Fafhrd had to duck.

There turned out to be six in the family, all told. The father, his equally thin and weather-beaten wife, the older son, a young boy, a daughter, and a mumbling grandfather, whom extreme age confined to a chair before the fire. The last two were the most interesting of the lot.

The girl was in that usually gawkish age of mid-adolescence, but there was a wild, coltish grace to the way she moved her lanky legs and the slim arms with their prominent elbows. She was very shy, and gave the impression that at any moment she might dart out the door and into the woods.

In order to amuse her and win her confidence, the Mouser began to perfrom small feats of legerdemain, plucking copper coins out of the ears of the astonished peasant, and bone needles from the nose of his giggling wife. Using sleight of hand and other tricks of illusion, he turned beans into buttons and back again into beans, swallowed a large fork, made a tiny wooden manikin jig on the palm of his hand, and utterly bewildered the cat by pulling what seemed to be a mouse out of its mouth. All the while he kept up a stream of convulsively nonsensical chatter.

The old folks gaped and grinned. The little boy became frantic with excitement. His sister watched everything with concentrated interest, and even smiled warmly when the Mouser presented her with a square of fine, green linen he had conjured from the air, although she was still too shy to speak.

Then Fafhrd roared sea-chanteys that rocked the roof and sang lusty songs that set the old grandfather gurgling with delight. Meanwhile the Mouser fetched a small wine-skin from his saddlebags, concealed it under his cloak, and filled the oak goblets as if by magic. These rapidly fuddled the peasants, who were unused to so potent a beverage, and by the time Fafhrd had finished telling a bloodcurling tale of the frozen north, they were all nodding, save the girl and the grandfather.

The latter looked up at the merrymaking adventurers, his watery eyes filled with a kind of impish, senile glee, and mumbled, "You two be right clever men. Maybe beast won't get you." But before this remark could be elucidated, his eyes had gone vacant again, and in a few moments he was snoring.

Soon all were asleep, Fafhrd and the Mouser keeping their weapons close at hand, and only variegated snores and occasional snaps from the dying embers disturbed the silence of the cottage.

THE Day of the Cat dawned clear and cool. The Mouser stretched himself luxuriously and, catlike, flexed his muscles and sucked in the sweet, dewy air. He felt exceptionally cheerful and eager to be up and doing. Was not this *his* day, the day of the Gray Mouser, a day in which luck could not fail him?

His slight movements awakened

Fafhrd and together they stole silently from the cottage so as not to disturb the peasants, who were oversleeping with the wine they had taken. They refreshed their faces and hands in the wet grass and paid a visit to the stable. Then they munched some bread, washed it down with drafts of cool well water flavored with wine, and made ready to depart.

This time their preparations were well thought out. The Mouser carried a mallet and a stout steel pry-bar, in case they had to attack masonry, and made certain that candles, flint, wedges, chisels, and several other small tools were in his pouch. Fafhrd borrowed a pick from the peasant's implements and tucked a coil of thin, strong rope in his belt. He also took his bow and quiver of arrows.

The forest was delightful at this early hour. Bird cries and chatterings came from overhead, and once they glimpsed a black, squirrellike animal scampering along a bough. A couple of chipmunks scurried under a bush dotted with red berries. What had been shadow the evening before was now a variety of green-leafed beauty. The two adventurers trod softly.

They had hardly gone more than a bowshot into the woods, when they heard a faint rustling behind them. The rustling came rapidly nearer, and suddenly the peasant girl burst into view. She stood breathless and poised, one hand touching a tree trunk, the other pressing aside some leaves, ready to fly away at the first sudden move. Fafhrd and the Mouser stood as stock-still as if she were a doe or a dryad. Finally she managed to conquer her shyness and speak.

"You go there?" she questioned, indicating the direction of the treasure house with a quick, ducking nod. Her dark eyes were serious.

"Yes, we go there," answered Fafhrd, smiling.

"Don't." This word was accompanied by a rapid headshake.

"But why shouldn't we, girl?" Fafhrd's voice was gentle and sonorous, like an integral part of the forest. It seemed to touch some spring within the girl that enabled her to feel more at ease. She gulped a big breath and began.

"Because I watch it from edge of the forest, but never go close. Never, never, never. I say to myself there be a magic circle I must not cross. And I say to myself there be a giant inside. Queer and fearsome giant." Her words were coming rapidly now, like an undammed stream. "All gray he be, like the stone of his house. All gray—eyes and hair and fingernails, too. And he has a stone club as big as a tree. And he be big, bigger than you, twice as big." Here she nodded at Fafhrd. "And with his club he kills, kills, kills. But only if you go close. Every day, almost, I play a game with him. I pretend to be going to cross the magic circle. And he watches from inside the door, where I can't see him, and he think I'm going to cross. And I dance through the forest all around the house, and he follows me, peering from the little windows. And I get closer and closer to the circle, closer and closer. But I never cross. And he be very angry and gnash his teeth, like rocks rubbing rocks, so that the house shakes. And I run, run, run away. But you mustn't go inside. Oh, you mustn't."

She paused, as if startled by her own daring. Her eyes were fixed anxiously on Fafhrd. She seemed drawn toward him. The northerner's reply was serious and carried no overtone of patronizing laughter at her childish fantasy.

"But you've never actually seen the gray giant, have you?"

"Oh, no. He be too cunning. But I say to myself he must be there inside. And that's the same thing, isn't it?

The Gray Mouser chuckled softly. "I think perhaps there is more than one copy of that so-secret message!"

Grandfather knows about him. We used to talk about him, when I was little. Grandfather calls him the beast. But the others laugh at me, so I don't tell."

Here was another astounding paradox, thought the Mouser with an inward grin. Imagination was such a rare commodity with the peasants that this girl unhesitatingly took it for reality.

"Don't worry about us, girl. We'll be on the watch for your gray giant," he started to say, but he had less success than Fafhrd in keeping his voice completely natural or else the cadence of his words didn't chime so well with the forest setting.

The girl uttered one more warning, "Don't go inside, oh, please," and turned and darted away.

THE TWO adventurers looked at each other and smiled. Somehow the unexpected fairy tale, with its conventional ogre and its charmingly naïve narrator, added to the delight of the dewy morning. Without a comment they resumed their soft-stepping progress. And it was well that they went quietly, for when they had gotten within a stone's

throw of the clearing, they heard low voices that seemed to be in grumbling altercation. Immediately they cached the pick and pry-bar and mallet under a clump of bushes, and stole forward, taking advantage of the natural cover and watching where they planted their feet.

On the edge of the clearing stood half a dozen stocky men in black chain-mail shirts, bows on their backs, short swords at their sides. They were immediately recognizable as the rogues who had laid the ambuscade. They seemed to be arguing about something. Two of them started for the treasure house, only to be recalled by a comrade. Whereupon the argument apparently started afresh.

"That red-haired one," whispered the Mouser after an unhurried look. "I can swear I've seen him in the stables of Lord Rannarsh. My guess was right. It seems we have a rival."

"Why do they wait, and keep pointing at the house?" whispered Fafhrd. "Is it because some of their comrades are already at work inside?"

The Mouser shook his head. "That cannot be. See those picks and shovels and levers they have rested on the ground? No, they wait for someone—for a leader. Some of them want to examine the house before he arrives. Others counsel against it. And I will bet my head against a bowling ball that the leader is Rannarsh himself. He is much too greedy and suspicious to intrust a treasure quest to any henchman."

"What's to do?" murmured Fafhrd. "We cannot enter the house unseen, even if it were the wise course, which it isn't. Once in, we'd be trapped."

"I've half a mind to loose my sling at them right now and teach them something about the art of ambuscade," replied the Mouser ferociously. "Only then the survivors would flee into the house and hold us off until, mayhap, Rannarsh came, and more men with him."

"We might circle part way round the clearing," said Fafhrd, after a moment's pause, "all the time keeping to the woods. Then we can enter the clearing unseen and shelter ourselves behind one of the small domes. In that way we become masters of the doorway, and can prevent their taking cover inside. Thereafter I will address them suddenly and try to frighten them off, you meanwhile staying hid and giving substance to my threats by making enough racket for ten men."

This seemed the handiest plan to both of them, and they managed the first part of it without a single hitch. The Mouser crouched behind the small dome, his sword, sling, daggers, and a couple of sticks of wood laid ready for either noise-making or fight. Then Fafhrd strode briskly forward, his bow held carelessly in front of him, an arrow fitted to the string. It was done so casually that it was a few moments before Rannarsh's benchmen noticed him. Then they quickly reached for their own bows and as quickly desisted when they saw that the huge newcomer had the advantage of them. They scowled in irritated perplexity.

"Ho, rogues!" began Fafhrd, "we allow you just as much time as it will take you to make yourselves scarce, and no more. Don't think to resist or come skulking back. My men are scattered through the woods. At a sign from me they will feather you with arrows."

MEANWHILE the Mouser had begun a low din and was slowly and artistically working it up in volume. Rapidly varying the pitch and intonation of his voice and making it echo first from some part of the building and then from the forest wall, he created the illusion of a whole squad of bloodthirsty bowmen. Nasty cries of "Shall we let fly?" "You take the redhead," and "Try for the belly shot; it's surest," kept coming now from one point and now another,

until it was all Fafhrd could do to refrain from laughing at the woebegone, startled glances the six rogues kept darting around. But his merriment was extinguished when, just as the rogues were starting to slink shamefacedly away, an arrow arched erratically out of the woods, passing a spear's length above his head.

"Curse that branch!" came a deep, grunty voice the Mouser recognized as issuing from the throat of Lord Rannarsh. Immediately after, it began to bark commands.

"At them, you fools! It's all a trick. There are only the two of them. Rush them!"

Fafhrd turned without warning and loosed point-blank at the voice, but did not silence it. Then he dodged back behind the small dome and ran with the Mouser for the woods.

The six rogues, wisely deciding that a charge with drawn swords would be overly heroic, followed suit, unslinging their bows as they went. One of them turned before he had reached sufficient cover, nocking an arrow. It was a mistake. A ball from the Mouser's sling took him low in the forehead, and he toppled forward dead.

The sound of that hit and fall was the last heard in the clearing for quite a long time, save for the inevitable bird cries, some of which were genuine, and some of which were communications between Fafhrd and the Mouser. The conditions of the death-dealing contest were obvious. Once it had fairly begun, no one dared enter the clearing, since he would become a fatally easy mark; and the Mouser was sure that none of the five remaining rogues had taken shelter in the treasure house. Nor did either side dare withdraw all its men out of sight of the doorway, since that would allow someone to take a commanding position in the top of the tower, providing the tower had a negotiable stair. Therefore it was a case of sneaking about near the edge of the clearing, circling and counter-circling, with a great deal of squatting in a good place and waiting for somebody to come along and be shot.

The Mouser and Fafhrd began by adopting the latter strategy, first moving about twenty paces nearer the point at which the rogues had disappeared. Evidently their patience was a little better than that of their opponents. For after about ten minutes of nerve-racking waiting, during which pointed seed pods had a queer way of looking like arrowheads, Fafhrd got the red-haired henchman full in the throat just as he was bending his bow for a shot at the Mouser. That left four besides Rannarsh himself. Immediately they changed their tactics and separated, the Mouser circling rapidly around the treasure house and Fafhrd drawing as far back from the open space as he dared.

Rannarsh's men must have decided on the same plan, for the Mouser almost bumped into a scar-faced rogue as soft-footed as himself. At such close range, bow and sling were both useless —in their normal function. Scar-face attempted to jab the barbed arrow he held into the Mouser's eye. The Mouser weaved his body to one side, swung his sling like a whip, and felled the man senseless with a blow from the horn handle. Then he retreated a few paces, thanked the Day of the Cat that there had not been two of them, and took to the trees as being a safer, though slower method of progress. Keeping to the middle heights, he scurried along with the sure-footedness of a rope walker, swinging from branch to branch only when it was necessary, making sure he always had more than one way of retreat open.

HE HAD completed three quarters of his circuit when he heard the clash of swords a few trees ahead. He increased his speed and was soon looking

down on a sweet little combat. Fafhrd, his back to a great oak, had his broadsword out and was holding off two of Rannarsh's henchmen, who were attacking with their shorter weapons. It was a tight spot and the northerner realized it. He knew that ancient sagas told of heroes who could best four or more men at swordplay. He also knew that such sagas were lies, providing the hero's opponents were reasonably competent.

And Rannarsh's men were veterans. They attacked cautiously but incessantly, keeping their swords well in front of them and never slashing wildly. Their breath whistled through their nostrils, but they were grimly confident, knowing the northerner dared not lunge strongly at one of them because it would lay him wide open to a thrust by the other. Their game was to get one on each side of him and then attack simultaneously.

Fafhrd's counter was to shift position quickly and attack the nearer one murderously before the other could get back in range. In that way he managed to keep them side by side, where he could hold their blades in check by swift feints and crosswise sweeps. Sweat beaded his face and blood dripped from a scratch on his left thigh. A fearsome grin showed his white teeth, which occasionally parted to let slip a base, primitive insult.

The Mouser took in the situation at a glance, descended rapidly to a lower bough, and poised himself, aiming a dagger at the back of one of Fafhrd's adversaries. He was, however, standing very close to the thick trunk, and round this trunk darted a horny hand tipped with a short sword. The third henchman had also thought it wise to take to the trees. Fortunately for the Mouser, the man was uncertain of his footing and therefore his thrust, although well aimed, came a shade slow. As it was the little gray-clad man only managed to dodge by dropping off.

Thereupon he startled his opponent with a modest acrobatic feat. He did not drop to the ground, knowing that would put everyone at the mercy of the man in the tree. Instead, he grabbed hold of the branch on which he had been standing, swung himself smartly up again, and grappled. Steadying themselves now with one hand, now another, they drove for each other's throat, ramming with knees and elbows whenever they got a chance. At the first onset both dagger and sword were dropped, the latter sticking point down in the ground directly between the two battling henchmen and startling them so that Fafhrd almost got home an attack.

The Mouser and his man surged and rolled along the branch away from the trunk, inflicting little damage on each other since it was hard to keep balance. Finally they slid off at the same time, still gripping the branch with their hands. The puffing henchman aimed a vicious kick. The Mouser escaped it by yanking up his body and doubling up his legs. The latter he let fly violently, taking the henchman full in the chest with a dull thump. The unfortunate retainer of Rannarsh fell to the ground, and had the wind knocked out of him for a second time.

AT THE same time one of Fafhrd's opponents tried a trick that might have turned out well. Choosing a moment when his companion was pressing the northerner closely, he snatched for the sword sticking in the ground, intending to hurl it underhanded as if it were a javelin. But Fafhrd, whose superior endurance was rapidly giving him an advantage in speed, anticipated the movement and simultaneously made a brilliant counterattack against the other man. There were two thrust, both lightninglike, the first a fent at the belly, the second a slicing stab that sheared through the throat to the spine. Then he whirled around and, with a quick

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sweep, knocked both weapons out of the hands of the first man, who looked up in bewilderment and promptly collapsed into a sitting position, panting in almost utter exhaustion.

To cap the situation, the Mouser dropped lightly down, as if out of the sky. Fafhrd automatically started to raise his sword, for a backhand swipe. Then he stared at the Mouser for as long a time as it took the man sitting on the ground to give three tremendous gasps. Then he began to laugh, first uncontrollable snickers and later thundering peals of hysterical violence. It was a laughter in which battle-begotten madness, completely sated anger, and relief at escape from death were equally mingled.

"Oh, by Glaggerk and by Kos!" he roared. "By the Behemoth! Oh, by the Cold Waste and the guts of the Red God! Oh! Oh! Oh!" Again the insane bellowing burst explosively. "Oh, by the Killer Whale and the Cold Woman and her spawn!" By degrees the laughter died away, choking in his throat. He rubbed his forehead painfully with the palm of his hand, as if he were blind, and his face became starkly grave. Then he knelt beside the man he had just slain, and straightened his limbs, and closed his eyes, and began to weep in a dignified, almost stoical way that would have seemed ridiculous and hypocritical in anyone but a barbarian.

Meanwhile the Mouser's reactions were nowhere near as primitive. He felt worried, ironic, and slightly sick. He understood Fafhrd's emotions, but knew that he would not feel the full force of his own for some time yet, and by then they would be deadened and somewhat inhibited. He peered about anxiously, fearful of an anticlimactic attack that would find his companion helpless. He counted over the tally of their opponents. Yes, the six henchmen were all accounted for. But Rannarsh himself, where was Rannarsh? He fumbled in his pouch to make sure he had not lost his good-luck talismans and amulets. His lips moved rapidly as he murmured two or three prayers and cantrips. But all the while he held his sling ready, and his eyes never once ceased their quick shifting.

From the middle of a thick clump of bushes he heard a series of agonized gasps, as the man he had felled from the tree began to regain his wind. The henchman whom Fafhrd had disarmed, his face ashy pale from exhaustion rather than fright, was slowly edging back into the forest. The Mouser watched him carelessly, noting the comical way in which the steel cap had slipped down over his forehead and rested against the bridge of his nose. Meanwhile the gasps of the man in the bushes were taking on a less agonized and more vocal quality. At almost the same instant, the two rose to their feet and stumbled off into the forest.

The Mouser listened to their blundering retreat. He was sure that there was nothing more to fear from them. *They* wouldn't come back. And then a little smile stole into his face, for he heard the sounds of a third person joining them in their flight. That would be Rannarsh, thought the Mouser, a man cowardly at heart and incapable of carrying on single-handed. It did not occur to him at the moment that the third person might be the man he had stunned with his sling handle.

MOSTLY just to be doing something, he followed them leisurely for a couple of bowshots into the forest. Their trail was easy to follow, being marked by trampled bushes and thorns bearing tatters of cloth. It led in a beeline directly away from the clearing, hardly deviating a yard anywhere. Satisfied, he returned, going out of his way to

regain the mallet, pick, and pry-bar.

He found Fafhrd tying a loose bandage around the scratch on his thigh. The northerner's emotions had run their gamut and he was himself again. The dead man for whom he had been somberly grieving now meant no more to him than food for beetles and birds. Whereas for the Mouser it continued to be a somewhat frightening and sickening object.

"And now do we proceed with our interrupted business?" the Mouser asked.

Fafhrd nodded in a matter-of-fact manner and rose to his feet. Together they entered the rocky clearing. It came to them as a surprise how little time the fight had taken. True, the sun had moved somewhat higher, but the atmosphere was still that of rather early morning. The birds were still singing fitfully. The dew had not dried yet. The treasure house of Urgaan of Angarngi stood massive, featureless, grotesquely impressive, and unaltered. Save for a feeling of emptiness and emotional exhaustion, they might be just arriving from the cottage.

"The peasant girl predicted the truth without knowing it," said the Mouser with a smile. "We played her game of 'circle-the-clearing and don't-cross-the-magic-circle,' didn't we?"

The treasure house had no fears for him today. He recalled his perturbations of the previous evening, but was unable to understand them or see any reason for them—doubtless they were a delayed reaction from the shock of the ambuscade. The very idea of a guardian seemed somewhat ridiculous. There were a hundred other ways of explaining the skeleton inside the doorway.

So this time it was the Mouser who skipped into the treasure house ahead of Fafhrd, The interior was disappointing, being empty of any furnishings and as bare and unornamented as the outside walls. Just a large, low room. To either side square doorways led to the smaller domes, while to the rear a long hallway was dimply apparent, and the beginnings of a stair leading to the upper part of the main dome.

With only a casual glance at the skull and the broken skeleton, the Mouser made his way toward the stair.

"Our document," he said to Fafhrd, who was now beside him, "speaks of the treasure as resting just below the keystone of the chief dome. Therefore we must seek in the room or rooms above."

"True," answered the northerner, glancing around. "But I wonder, Mouser, just what use this structure served. A man who builds a house solely to hide a treasure is shouting to the world that he *has* a treasure. Do you think it might have been a temple?"

THE MOUSER suddenly shrank back with a sibilant exclamation. Sprawled a little way up the stair was another skeleton, the major bones hanging together in a somewhat lifelike fashion. The whole upper half of the skull was smashed to fragments.

"Our hosts are overly ancient and indecently naked," hissed the Mouser, angry with himself for being badly startled. Then he darted up the stairs to examine the grisly find. His sharp eyes picked out several sharp objects among the bones. A rusty dagger, a tarnished gold ring that looped a knucklebone, a handful of horn buttons, and a slim, green-eaten copper cylinder. The last awakened his curiosity. He picked it up, dislodging the bones in the process, so that they fell apart, rattling dryly. He managed to pry off the cap of the cylinder with his dagger point, and shook out a tightly rolled sheet of ancient parchment. This he gingerly unwound. Fafhrd and he scanned the lines of diminutive red let-

tering by the light from a small window on the landing above.

> Mine is a secret treasure. Orichalchum have I, and crystal, and blood-red amber. Rubies and emeralds that demons would war for, and a diamond as big as the skull of a man. Yet none have seen them save I. I, Urgaan of Angarngi, scorn the flattery and the envy of fools. A fittingly lonely treasure house have I builded for my jewels. There, hidden under the keystone, they may dream unperturbed until earth and sky wear away. A day's ride beyond the village of Soreev, in the valley of the two double-humped hills, lies that house, domed and single-towered. It is empty. Any fool may enter. Let him. I care not.

"The details differ slightly," murmured the Mouser, "but the phrases have the same ring as in our document."

"The man must have been mad," asserted Fafhrd, scowling. "Or else why should he carefully hide a treasure and then, with equal care, leave directions for finding it?"

"We thought *our* document was a memorandum or an oversight," said the Mouser thoughtfully. "Such a notion can hardly explain *two* documents." Lost in strange speculation, he turned toward the remaining section of the stair, only to find still another skull grinning at him from a shadowy angle. This time he was not startled, yet he experienced the same feeling that a fly must experience, when, enmeshed in a spider's web, it sees the dangling, empty corpses of a dozen of its brothers. But the feeling was only momentary. He began to speak rapidly.

"Nor can such a notion explain *three* or *four* or mayhap a *dozen* such documents. For how came these other questers here, unless each had found a written message? Urgaan of Angarngi may have been mad, but he sought deliberately to lure men here. One thing is certain. This house conceals—or did conceal—some deadly trap. Some guardian. Some giant beast, say. Or perhaps the very stones distill a poison. Perhaps hidden springs release sword blades which stab out through cracks in the walls and then return."

"That cannot be," answered Fafhrd. "These men were killed by great, bashing blows. The ribs and spine of the first were splintered. The second had his skull cracked open. And that third one there. See! His pelvic bones are smashed."

The Mouser started to reply. Then his face broke into an unexpected smile. He could see the conclusion to which Fafhrd's arguments were unconsciously leading—and he knew that that conclusion was ridiculous. What thing would kill with great, bashing blows? What thing but the gray giant the peasant girl had told them about? The gray giant twice as tall as a man, with his great stone club—a giant fit only for fairy tales and fantasies.

And Fafhrd returned the Mouser's smile. It seemed to him that they were making a great deal of fuss about nothing. These skeletons were suggestive enough, to be sure, but did they not represent men who had died many, many years ago—centuries ago? What guardian could outlast three centuries? Why, that was a long enough time to weary the patience of a demon! And there were no such things as demons, anyhow. And there was no earthly use in mucking around about ancient fears and horrors that were as dead as dust. The whole matter, thought Fafhrd, boiled down to something very simple. They had come to an empty house to see if there was a treasure in it. Well then, shouldn't they just go ahead and get the business over with?

Agreed upon this point, the two comrades made their way up the remaining section of stair that led to the dimmer regions of the House of Angarngi. Despite their confidence, they moved cautiously and kept sharp watch on the shadows lying ahead. This was wise.

JUST as they reached the top, a flash of steel spun out of the darkness. It nicked the Mouser in the shoulder as he twisted to one side. There was a metallic clank as it fell to the stone floor. The Mouser, gripped by a sudden spasm of anger and fright, ducked down and dashed rapidly through the door from which the weapon had come, straight at the danger, whatever it was.

"Dagger-tossing in the dark, eh, you slick-bellied worm?" Fafhrd heard the Mouser cry, and then he, too, had plunged through the door.

Lord Rannarsh cowered against the wall, his rich hunting garb dusty and disordered, his black, wavy hair pushed back from his forehead, his cruelly handsome face a sallow mask of hate and extreme terror. For the moment the latter emotion seemed to predominate and, oddly enough, it did not appear to be directed toward the men he had just assailed, but toward something else, something unapparent.

"O gods!" he cried, "let me go from here. The treasure is yours. Let me out of this place. Else I am doomed. The thing has played at cat and mouse with me. I cannot bear it. I cannot bear it!"

"So now we pipe a different tune, do we?" hissed the Mouser furiously. "First dagger-tossing, then fright and pleas!"

"Filthy coward tricks," added Fafhrd succinctly. "Skulking here safe while your henchmen died bravely."

"Safe? Safe, you say? O gods!" Rannarsh almost screamed. Then a subtle change became apparent in his rigid-muscled face. It was not that his terror decreased. If anything, that became greater. But there was added to it, over and above, a consciousness of desperate shame, a realization that he had demeaned himself uneradicably in the eyes of these two ruffians. His lips began to writhe, showing tight-clenched teeth. A look of insane cunning crept into his white-rimmed eyes. He extended his left hand in a gesture of supplication.

"Oh, mercy, have mercy," he cried piteously, and his right hand twitched a second dagger from his belt and hurled it underhand at Fafhrd.

The northerner knocked aside the weapon with a swift blow of his palm, then said deliberately, "He is yours, Mouser. Kill the man."

And now it was cat against cornered rat indeed. Lord Rannarsh whipped a gleaming sword from its gold-worked scabbard and rushed in, cutting, thrusting, stabbing. The Mouser gave ground slightly, his slim blade flickering in a defensive counterattack that was wavering and elusive, yet deadly. He brought Rannarsh's rush to a standstill. His blade moved so quickly that it seemed to weave a net of steel around the man. Then it leaped forward three times in rapid succession. At the first thrust it bent nearly double against a concealed shirt of chain mail. The second thrust pierced the belly. The third transfixed the throat. Lord Rannarsh fell to the floor, spitting and gagging, his fingers clawing at his neck. There he died.

"Butchery," said Fafhrd somberly, "simple butchery. Although he had fairer play than he deserved, and handled his sword well. Mouser, I like not this killing, although there was surely more justice to it than the others."

The Mouser, wiping his weapon against his opponent's thigh, understood what Fafhrd meant. He felt no elation at his victory, only a cold, queasy disgust. A moment before he had been raging, but now there was no anger left in him. He pulled open his gray jerkin and inspected the dagger wound in his left shoulder. A little blood was still welling from it and trickling down his arm. Not much. The flow had almost stopped.

The gaunt old priest spoke in a hollow voice. "I seek no treasure; I have lived here forty years. You seek treasure—and will die!"

"Lord Rannarsh was no coward," he said slowly. "He killed himself, or at least caused his own death, because we had seen him terrified and heard him cry in fright."

AND at these words, without any warning whatsoever, stark terror fell like an icy eclipse upon the hearts of the Gray Mouser and Fafhrd. It was as if Lord Rannarsh had left them a legacy of fear, which passed to them immediately upon his death. And the unmanning thing about it was that they had no premonitory apprehension, no hint of its approach. It did not take root and grow gradually greater, like normal fear. It came all at once, para-

lyzing, overwhelming. Worse still, there was no discernible cause. One moment they were looking down with something of indifference upon the twisted corpse of Lord Rannarsh. The next moment their legs were weak, their guts were cold, their spines prickling, their teeth clicking, their hearts pounding, their hair lifting at the roots.

Fafhrd felt as if he had walked unsuspecting into the jaws of a gigantic serpent. His barbaric mind was stirred to the deeps. He thought of the grim god Kos brooding alone in the icy silence of the Cold Waste. He thought of the masked powers Fate and Chance, and of the game they play for the blood and brains of men. And he did not will these thoughts. Rather did the intense fear seem to liberate them, so that they rose into consciousness unbidden.

Slowly he regained control over his quaking limbs and twitching muscles. As if in a nightmare, he looked around him slowly, taking in the details of his surroundings. The room they were in was semicircular, forming half of the great dome. Two small windows, high in the curving ceiling, let in light.

An inner voice kept repeating, "Don't make a sudden move. Slowly. Slowly. Above all, don't run. The others did. That was why they died so quickly. Slowly. Slowly."

He saw the Mouser's face. It reflected his own terror. How much longer would this last? How much longer could he stand it without running amuck? How much longer could he passively endure this feeling of a great invisible paw reaching out over him, inch by inch, implacably?

The faint sound of footsteps came from the room below. Regular and unhurried footsteps. Now they were crossing into the rear hallway below. And now they were on the stairs. And now they had reached the landing, and were advancing up the second section of the stairs.

The man who entered the room was tall and frail and old and very gaunt. Scant locks of intensely black hair straggled down over his high-domed forehead. His sunken, waxy cheeks showed clearly the outlines of his long jawbone, and waxy skin was pulled tight over his small nose. Fanatical eyes burned in deep, bony sockets. He wore the simple, sleeveless robe of a holy man. A pouch hung from the cord round his waist.

He fixed his eyes upon Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser.

"I greet you, men of blood," he said in a hollow voice.

Then his gaze fell with displeasure upon the corpse of Rannarsh.

"More blood has been shed. It is not well."

And with the bony forefinger of his left hand he traced in the air a curious triple square, the sign sacred to the Great God of Lankhmar.

"Do not speak," his calm, toneless voice continued, "for I know your purposes. You have come to take treasure from this house. Others have sought to do the same. They have failed. You will fail. As for myself, I have no lust for treasure. For forty years I have lived on crusts and water, devoting my spirit to the Great God." Again he traced the curious sign. "The gems and ornaments of this world and the jewels and gauds of the world of demons cannot tempt or corrupt me. My purpose in coming here is to destroy an evil thing.

"I"—and here he touched his chest—"I am Arvlan of Angarngi, the ninth lineal descendant of Urgaan of Angarngi. This I always knew, and sorrowed for, because Urgaan of Angarngi was a man of evil. But not until fifteen days ago, on the Day of the Spider, did I discover from ancient documents that Urgaan had builded this house, and builded it to be an eternal trap for the

unwise and venturesome. He has left a guardian here, and that guardian has endured.

"Cunning was my accursed ancestor, Urgaan, cunning and evil. The most skillful architect in all Lankhmar was Urgaan, a man wise in the ways of stone and learned in geometrical lore. But he scorned the Great God. He lusted after improper powers. He had commerce with demons, and won from them an unnatural treasure. This he hid, but hid in such a way that it would wreck endless evil on the world. It is my purpose and my right to destroy that evil.

"Seek not to dissuade me, lest doom fall upon you. As for me, no harm can befall me. The hand of the Great God is poised above me, ready to ward off any danger that may threaten his faithful servant. His will is my will. Do not speak, men of blood! I go to destroy the treasure of Urgaan of Angarngi."

And with these words the gaunt holy man walked calmly on, with measured stride, like an apparition, and disappeared through the narrow doorway that led into the forward part of the great dome.

FAFHRD stared after him, his green eyes wide, feeling no desire to follow or to interfere. His terror had not left him, but it was transmuted in a queer way. He was still aware of a dreadful threat, but it no longer seemed to be directed against him personally.

Meanwhile, a most curious notion had lodged in the mind of the Mouser. He felt that he had just now seen, not a venerable holy man, but a dim reflection of the centuries-dead Urgaan of Angarngi. Was not this Arvlan a lineal descendant? Surely Urgaan had that same high-domed forehead, that same secret pride, that same air of command! And those locks of youthfully black hair, which contrasted so ill with the aged face. Were they too not part of a picture looming from the past? A picture dimmed and distorted by time, but retaining something of the power and individuality of the ancient original?

They heard the footsteps of the holy man proceed a little way into the other room. Then for the space of a dozen heartbeats there was complete silence. Then the floor began to tremble slightly under their feet, as if the earth were quaking, or as if a giant were treading near. Then there came a single quavering cry from the next room, cut off in the middle of a single sickening crash that made them lurch. Then, once again, utter silence.

Fafhrd and the Mouser looked at one another in blank amazement—not so much because of what they had just heard but because, almost at the moment of the crash, the pall of terror had lifted from them completely. They jerked out their swords and hurried into the next room.

It was a duplicate of the one they had just quitted, save that instead of two small windows, there were three, one of them near the floor. Also, there was but a single door, the one through which they had just entered.

Near the thick center wall, which bisected the dome, lay the body of the holy man. Only "lay" was not the right word. Left shoulder and chest were mashed against the floor.

Set in the wall near his head was a stone about two feet square, jutting out a little from the rest. On this was boldly engraved, in antique Lankhmarian hieroglyphs: "Here rests the treasure of Urgaan of Angarngi."

The sight of that stone was like a blow in the face. It roused every ounce of obstinacy and reckless determination in them. What matter that an old man sprawled smashed beside it? They had their swords! What matter they now had proof some grim guardian resided in the treasure house? They could take

care of themselves! Run away and leave that stone unmoved, with its insultingly provocative inscription? No, by Kos and the Behemoth! They'd see themselves in Hades first!

Fafhrd ran to fetch the pick and the other large tools, which had been dropped on the stairs when Lord Rannarsh tossed his first dagger. The Mouser looked more closely at the jutting stone. The cracks around it were wide and filled with a dark, tarry mixture. It gave out a slighly hollow sound when he tapped it with his sword hilt. He calculated that the wall was about six feet thick at this point—enough to contain a sizable cavity. He tapped experimentally along the wall in both directions, but the hollow ring quickly ceased. Evidently the cavity was a fairly small one. He noted that the crevices between all the other stones were very fine, showing no evidence of any cementing substance whatsoever. In fact, he couldn't be sure that they weren't false crevices, superficial cuts in the surface of solid rock. But that hardly seemed possible. He heard Fafhrd returning, but continued his minute examination.

THE STATE of the Mouser's mind was peculiar. A dogged determination to get at the treasure overshadowed other emotions. The inexplicably sudden vanishing of his former terror had left certain parts of his mind benumbed. It was as if he had unconsciously decided to hold his thoughts in leash until he had seen what the treasure cavity contained. For example, although his examination of the room assured him that the possibility of a secret panel or door was most unlikely, he did not ask himself how the creature or entity that struck down the holy man had entered and escaped. He was content to keep his mind occupied with material details, and yet make no deductions from them. A delayed emotional reaction to the fights in the forest and the slaying of Rannarsh undoubtedly contributed to this attitude.

His calmness gave him a feeling of safety—at least temporary safety. His experiences had vaguely convinced him that the guardian, whatever it was, which had smashed the holy man and played cat and mouse with Rannarsh and themselves, did not strike without first inspiring a premonitory terror in its victims.

Fafhrd felt very much the same way, except that he was even more single-minded in his determination to solve the riddle of the inscribed stone.

They attacked the wide crevices with chisel and mallet. The dark tarry mixture came away fairly easily, first in hard lumps, later in slightly rubbery, gouged strips. After they had cleared it away to the depth of a finger, Fafhrd inserted the pick and managed to move the stone slightly. Thus the Mouser was enabled to gouge a little more deeply on that side. Then Fafhrd subjected the other side of the stone to the leverage of the pick. So the work proceeded, with alternate pryings and gougings.

They concentrated on each detail of the job with uncessary intensity, mainly to keep their imaginations in check. What good could come of letting your thoughts be haunted by the image of a man more than two hundred years dead? A man with high-domed forehead, sunken cheeks, nose of a skull—that is, if the dead thing on the floor was a true type of the breed of Angarngi. A man who had somehow won a great treasure, and then hid it away from all eyes, seeking to obtain neither glory nor material profit from it. Who said he scorned the envy of fools, and who yet wrote many provocative notes in diminutive red lettering in order to inform fools of his treasure, and make them envious. Who seemed to be reaching out across the dusty centuries to grapple with you,

like a spider spinning a web to catch a fly on the other side of the world. No, best not think of him until you had more to go on!

And yet, he was a skillful architect, the holy man had said. Could such an architect build a stone automaton twice as tall as a tall man? A gray stone automaton with a great club? Could he make a hiding place for such an automaton, and from which it could emerge, deal death, and then return? No, no, such notions were childish, not to be entertained! Stick to the job in hand. First find what lay behind the inscribed stone. Leave thoughts until afterward.

The store was beginning to give more easily to the pressure of the pick. Soon they would be able to get a good purchase on it and edge it out.

Meanwhile an entirely new sensation was growing on the Mouser—not one of terror at all, but of physical revulsion. The air he breathed seemed thick and sickening, although he noted no special odor. He found himself disliking the texture and consistency of the tarry mixture, which somehow he could only liken to wholly imaginary substances, such as the dung of dragons or the solidified vomit of the behemoth. He avoided touching it with his fingers, and he kicked away the litter of chunks and strips that had gathered around his feet. The sensation of queasy loathing became difficult to endure.

He tried to fight it, but had no more success than if it had been seasickness, which in some ways it resembled. He felt unpleasantly dizzy. His mouth kept filling with saliva. The cold sweat of nausea beaded his forehead. He could tell that Fafhrd was unaffected, and he hesitated to mention the matter; it seemed ridiculously out of place, especially as it was unaccompanied by any fear or fright. Finally the stone itself began to have the same effect on him as the tarry mixture, filling him with a seemingly causeless, but none the less sickening revulsion. Then he could bear it no longer. With a vaguely apologetic nod to Fafhrd, he dropped his chisel and went to the low window for a breath of fresh air.

THIS did not seem to help matters much. He pushed his head through the window and gulped deeply. His mental processes were overshadowed by the general indifference of extreme nausea, and everything seemed very far away. Therefore when he saw that the peasant girl was standing in the middle of the clearing, it was some time before he began to consider the import of the fact. When he did, part of his sickness left him; or at least he was enabled to overpower it sufficiently to stare at her with gathering interest.

Her face was white as a sheet. Her fists were clenched, her arms held rigid at her sides. Even at the distance he could catch something of the mingled terror and determination with which her eyes were fixed on the great doorway. Toward this doorway she was forcing herself to move, one jerking step after another, pausing between each step, as if she had to keep screwing her courage to a higher pitch. Suddenly the Mouser began to feel frightened, not for himself at all, but for the girl. Her terror was obviously intense, and yet she must be doing what she was doing—braving her "queer and fearsome gray giant"—for his sake and Fafhrd's. At all costs, he thought, she must be prevented from coming closer. It was wrong that she be subjected for one moment longer to such a horribly intense terror.

His mind was confused by his abominable nausea, yet he knew what he must do. He hurried toward the stairs with shaky strides, waving Fafhrd another vague gesture. Just as he was going out of the room he chanced to turn up his eyes, and spied something peculiar on the ceiling. What it was he did not fully realize for some moments.

Fafhrd hardly noticed the Mouser's movements, much less his gestures. The block of stone was rapidly yielding to his efforts. He had previously experienced a faint suggestion of the Mouser's nausea, but perhaps because of his greater single-mindedness, it had not become seriously bothersome. And now his attention was wholly concentrated on the stone. Persistent prying had edged it out a palm's breadth from the wall. Seizing it firmly in his two powerful hands, he tugged it from one side to the other, back and forth. The dark, viscous stuff clung to it tenaciously, but with each sidewise jerk it moved forward a little.

The Mouser lurched hastily down the stairs, fighting vertigo. His feet kicked bones and sent them knocking against the walls. What was it he had seen on the ceiling? Somehow, it seemed to mean something. But he must get the girl out of the clearing. She mustn't come any closer to the house. She mustn't enter.

Fafhrd began to feel the weight of the stone, and knew that it was nearly clear. It was damnably heavy—almost a foot thick. Two carefully gauged heaves finished the job. The stone overbalanced. He stepped back to avoid having his feet crushed. The stone crashed ponderously on the floor. A faint, jewellike glitter came from the cavity that had been revealed. Fafhrd eagerly thrust his head into it.

The Mouser staggered toward the doorway. It was a bloody smear. That was it, a bloody smear he had seen against the ceiling. And just above the corpse of the holy man. But why should that be? He'd been smashed against the floor, hadn't he? The girl. He must get to the girl. He must. There she was, almost at the doorway. He could see her. He felt the stone floor vibrating slightly beneath his feet. But that was his dizziness, wasn't it?

FAFHRD felt the vibration, too. But any thought he might have had about it was lost in his wonder at what he saw. The cavity seemed to be about four feet square. It was filled, to a level just below the surface of the opening, with a heavy metallic liquid that resembled mercury, except that it was night-black. Resting on this liquid was the most wondrous group of gems Fafhrd had ever imagined. They were indeed the gems the document mentioned.

In the center was a titan diamond, cut with a myriad of oddly angled facets. Around it were two irregular circles, the inner formed of twelve rubies, each a decahedron, the outer formed of seventeen emeralds, each an irregular octahedron. Lying between these gems, touching some of them, sometimes connecting them with each other, were thin, fragile-looking bars of crystal, amber, greenish tourmaline, and honey-pale orichalchum. All these objects did not seem to be floating in the metallic liquid, so much as resting upon it, their weight pressing down the surface into shallow depressions, some cup-shaped, others troughlike. The rods glowed faintly, while each of the gems glittered coldly with a light that Fafhrd's mind was strangely forced to believe was refracted starlight.

His gaze shifted to the mercurous, heavy fluid, where it bulged up between, and he saw distorted reflections of stars and constellations which he recognized, stars and constellations which would be visible now in the sky overhead, were it not for the concealing brilliance of the sun. An awesome wonder engulfed him. His gaze shifted back to the gems. There was something tremendously meaningful about their complex arrangement, something that seemed to speak of overwhelming truths, but in an alien symbolism. More, there was a compelling impression of inner movement, or sluggish thought, of inorganic consciousness. It was like what the eyes

see when they close at night—not utter blackness, but a shifting, fluid pattern of many-colored points of light. Feeling that he was reaching impiously into the core of a thinking mind, Fafhrd gripped with his right hand for the diamond as big as a man's skull.

The Mouser blundered through the doorway. There could be no mistaking it now. The stones were trembling. That bloody smear, as if the ceiling had champed down upon the holy man, crushing him against the floor, or as if the floor had struck upward. What could it mean? But there was the girl, her terror-wide eyes fastened upon him, her mouth open for a scream that did not come. He must drag her away, out of the clearing.

But why should he feel that a fearful threat was now directed at himself as well? Why should he feel that something was poised above him, threatening? As he stumbled down the terraced steps, he looked over his shoulder and up. The tower. O gods! The tower! It was falling. It was falling toward him. It was dipping at him over the dome. But look, there were no fractures along its length. It was not breaking. It was not falling. It was bending. It couldn't. O gods, it couldn't!

Fafhrd's hand jerked back, clutching the great, strangely faceted jewel, so heavy that he had difficulty in keeping his hold upon it. Immediately the surface of the metallic, star-reflecting fluid was disturbed. It bobbed and shook. Surely the whole house was shaking, too. The other jewels began to dart about erratically, like water insects on the surface of a puddle. The various crystalline and metallic bars began to spin, their tips attracted now to one jewel and now to another, as if they were lodestones. The whole surface of the fluid was in a whirling, jerking confusion that suggested a mind gone mad because of loss of its chief part.

FOR an agonizing instant the Mouser stared up amazement-frozen at the club-like top of the tower, ponderously hurling itself down upon him. Then he ducked his head and lunged forward at the girl, tackling her, rapidly rolling over and over with her, over and over. The tower top struck a sword's length behind them, with a thump that jolted them momentarily off the ground. Then it jerked itself up from the pitlike depression it had made.

Fafhrd tore his gaze away from the incredible, alien beauty of the jewel-confused cavity. His right hand—it was burning. The diamond was hot. Or, no, no, it was cold, cold beyond belief. What was happening to the room? Kos! It was changing shape! The ceiling was bulging downward at a point. He made for the door, then stopped dead in his tracks. The door was closing down, like a stony mouth. He turned and took a few steps over the quaking floor toward the small, low window. It snapped shut, like a sphincter. He tried to drop the diamond. It clung painfully to the inside of his hand. With a snap of his wrist he whipped it away from him. It hit the floor and began to bounce about like a living star.

The Mouser and the peasant girl rolled toward the edge of the clearing. The tower made two more tremendous bashes at them, but both went yards wide, like the blows of a blind madman. Now they were out of range. The Mouser lay sprawled on his side, watching a house that hunched and heaved like a beast, and a tower that bent double as it thumped grave-deep pits into the ground. It crashed into a group of boulders and its top broke off, but the jaggedly fractured end continued to beat the boulders in wanton anger, smashing them into fragments. The Mouser felt a compulsive urge to take out his dagger and stab himself in the heart. It couldn't be. It couldn't be. A man had to die when he saw some-

thing like that. Fafhrd! Fafhrd!

Fafhrd clung to sanity because he was threatened from a new direction at every minute and because he could say to himself, "I know. I know. The house is a beast, and the jewels are its mind. Now that mind is mad. I know. I know." Walls, ceiling, and floor quaked and heaved, but their movements did not seem to be directed especially at him. Occasional crashes almost deafened him. He staggered over rocky swells, dodging stony advances that were half bulges and half blows, but that lacked the speed and directness of the tower's first smash at the Mouser. The corpse of the holy man was jolted about in grotesque mechanical reanimation.

Only the great diamond seemed aware of Fafhrd. Exhibiting a fretful intelligence, it kept bounding at him viciously, sometimes leaping as high as his head. He involuntarily made for the door as his only hope. It was champing up and down with convulsive regularity. Watching his chance, he dived at it just as it was opening, and writhed clear. The diamond followed him, striking at his legs. The carcass of Rannarsh was flung sprawling in his path. He jumped over it, then slid, lurched, stumbled, fell down stairs in earthquake, where dry bones danced. Surely the beast must die, the house must crash and crush him flat. The diamond leaped for his skull, missed, hurtled through the air, and struck a wall. Thereupon it burst with an explosive crask into a great puff of iridescent dust, like a tension-laden drop of glass that has been cooled by being dipped into water.

Immediately the rhythm of the shaking of the house began to increase. Fafhrd raced across the vibrating floor, escaped by inches the embrace of the great doorway, plunged across the clearing—passing a dozen feet from the spot where the tower was beating boulders into crushed rock—and then leaped over two pits in the ground. His face was rigid and white. His eyes were vacant. He blundered bull-like into two or three trees, and only came to a halt because he knocked himself flat against one of them.

The house had ceased most of its random movements, and the whole of it was shaking like a hugh dark jelly. Suddenly its forward part heaved up. A behemoth in death agony. The two smaller domes were jerked ponderously a dozen feet off the ground, as if they were the paws. The tower whipped into convulsive rigidity. The main dome contracted sharply, like a stupendous lung. For a moment it hung there, poised. Then it crashed to the ground in a heap of gigantic stone shards. The earth shook. The forest resounded. Escaping air whipped branches and leaves. Suddenly, all was still. Only from the fractures in the stone a tarry, black liquid was slowing oozing, and there and there iridescent puffs of air suggested jewel-dust.

ALONG a narrow, dusty road two horsemen were cantering slowly toward the village of Soreev in the southernmost limits of the land of Lankhmar. They presented a somewhat battered appearance. The limbs of the larger, who was mounted on a chestnut gelding, showed several bruises, and there was a bandage around his thigh and another around the palm of his right hand. The smaller man, the one mounted on a gray mare, seemed to have suffered an equal number of injuries.

"Do you know where we're headed?" said the latter, breaking a long silence. "We're headed for a city. And in that city are endless houses of stone, stone towers without numbers, streets paved with stone, domes, arches, stairs. *Tcha*, if I feel then as I feel now, I'll never go within a bowshot of its walls."

His large companion smiled.

"What now, little man? Don't tell me you're afraid of—earthquakes?"

THE MISGUIDED HALO

By HENRY KUTTNER

THE MISGUIDED HALO

The Youngest Angel didn't quite understand—and K. Young found a saint's life not a happy one!

By Henry Kuttner

Illustrated by Kramer

THE youngest angel could scarcely be blamed for the error. They had given him a brand-new, shining halo and pointed down to the particular planet they meant. He had followed directions implicitly, feeling quite proud of the responsibility. This was the first time the youngest angel had ever been commissioned to bestow sainthood on a human.

So he swooped down to the earth, located Asia, and came to rest at the mouth of a cavern that gaped halfway up a Himalayan peak. He entered the cave, his heart beating wildly with excitement, preparing to materialize and give the holy lama his richly earned reward. For ten years the ascetic Tibetan Kai Yung had sat motionless, thinking holy thoughts. For ten more years he had dwelt on top of a pillar, acquiring additional merit. And for the last decade he had lived in this cave, a hermit, forsaking fleshly things.

The youngest angel crossed the threshold and stopped with a gasp of amazement. Obviously he was in the wrong place. An overpowering odor of fragrant saki assailed his nostrils, and he stared aghast at the wizened, drunken little man who squatted happily beside a fire, roasting a bit of goat flesh. A den of iniquity!

Naturally, the youngest angel, knowing little of the ways of the world, could not understand what had led to the lama's fall from grace. The great pot of saki that some misguidedly pious one had left at the cave mouth was an offering, and the lama had tasted, and tasted again. And by this time he was clearly not a suitable candidate for sainthood.

The youngest angel hesitated. The directions had been explicit. But surely this tippling reprobate could not be intended to wear a halo. The lama hiccuped loudly and reached for another cup of saki; and thereby decided the angel, who unfurled his wings and departed with an air of outraged dignity.

Now, in a Midwestern State of North America there is a town called Tibbett. Who can blame the angel if he alighted there, and, after a brief search, discovered a man apparently ripe for sainthood, whose name, as stated on the door of his small suburban home, was K. Young?

"I may have got it wrong," the youngest angel thought. "They said it was Kai Yung. But this is Tibbett, all right. He must be the man. Looks holy enough, anyway.

"Well," said the youngest angel, "here goes. Now, where's that halo?"

MR. YOUNG sat on the edge of his bed, with head lowered, brooding. A depressing spectacle. At length he arose and donned various garments. This done, and shaved and washed and combed, he descended the stairway to breakfast.

Jill Young, his wife, sat examining the paper and sipping orange juice.

She was a small, scarcely middle-aged, and quite pretty woman who had long ago given up trying to understand life. It was, she decided, much too complicated. Strange things were continually happening. Much better to remain a bystander and simply let them happen. As a result of this attitude, she kept her charming face unwrinkled and added numerous gray hairs to her husband's head.

More will be said presently of Mr. Young's head. It had, of course, been transfigured during the night. But as yet he was unaware of this, and Jill drank orange juice and placidly approved a silly-looking hat in an advertisement.

"Hello, Filthy," said Young. "Morning."

He was not addressing his wife. A small and raffish Scotty had made its appearance, capering hysterically about its master's feet, and going into a fit of sheer madness when the man pulled its hairy ears. The raffish Scotty flung its head sidewise upon the carpet and skated about the room on its muzzle, uttering strangled squeaks of delight. Growing tired of this at last, the Scotty, whose name was Filthy McNasty, began thumping its head on the floor with the apparent intention of dashing out its brains, if any.

Young ignored the familiar sight. He sat down, unfolded his napkin, and examined his food. With a slight grunt of appreciation he began to eat.

He became aware that his wife was eying him with an odd and distrait expression. Hastily he dabbed at his lips with the napkin. But Jill still stared.

Young scrutinized his shirt front. It was, if not immaculate, at least free from stray shreds of bacon or egg. He looked at his wife, and realized that she was staring at a point slightly above his head. He looked up.

Jill started slightly. She whispered, "Kenneth, what *is* that?"

Young smoothed his hair. "Er . . . what, dear?"

"That thing on your head."

The man ran exploring fingers across his scalp. "My head? How do you mean?"

"It's shining," Jill explained. "What on earth have you been doing to yourself?"

Mr. Young felt slightly irritated. "I have been doing nothing to myself. A man grows bald eventually."

Jill frowned and drank orange juice. Her fascinated gaze crept up again. Finally she said, "Kenneth, I wish you'd—"

"What?"

She pointed to a mirror on the wall.

With a disgusted grunt Young arose and faced the image in the glass. At first he saw nothing unusual. It was the same face he had been seeing in mirrors for years. Not an extraordinary face—not one at which a man could point with pride and say: "Look. *My face.*" But, on the other hand, certainly not a countenance which would cause consternation. All in all, an ordinary, clean, well-shaved, and rosy face. Long association with it had given Mr. Young a feeling of tolerance, if not of actual admiration.

But topped by a halo it acquired a certain eerieness.

The halo hung unsuspended about five inches from the scalp. It measured perhaps seven inches in diameter, and seemed like a glowing, luminous ring of white light. It was impalpable, and Young passed his hand through it several times in a dazed manner.

"It's a . . . halo," he said at last, and turned to stare at Jill.

THE Scotty, Filthy McNasty, noticed the luminous adornment for the first time. He was greatly interested. He did not, of course, know what it was, but there was always a chance that it

might be edible. He was not a very bright dog.

Filthy sat up and whined. He was ignored. Barking loudly, he sprang forward and attempted to climb up his master's body in a mad attempt to reach and rend the halo. Since it had made no hostile move, it was evidently fair prey.

Young defended himself, clutched the Scotty by the nape of its neck, and carried the yelping dog into another room, where he left it. Then he returned and once more looked at Jill.

At length she observed, "Angels wear halos."

"Do I look like an angel?" Young asked. "It's a . . . a scientific manifestation. Like . . . like that girl whose bed kept bouncing around. You read about that."

Jill had. "She did it with her muscles."

"Well, I'm not," Young said definitely. "How could I? It's scientific. Lots of things shine by themselves."

"Oh, yes. Toadstools."

The man winced and rubbed his head. "Thank you, my dear. I suppose you know you're being no help at all."

"Angels have halos," Jill said with a sort of dreadful insistence.

Young was at the mirror again. "Darling, would you mind keeping your trap shut for a while? I'm scared as hell, and you're far from encouraging."

Jill burst into tears, left the room, and was presently heard talking in a low voice to Filthy.

Young finished his coffee, but it was tasteless. He was not as frightened as he had indicated. The manifestation was strange, weird, but in no way terrible. Horns, perhaps, would have caused horror and consternation. But a halo— Mr. Young read the Sunday newspaper supplements, and had learned that everything odd could be attributed to the bizarre workings of science. Somewhere he had heard that all mythology had a basis in scientific fact. This comforted him, until he was ready to leave for the office.

He donned a derby. Unfortunately the halo was too large. The hat seemed to have two brims, the upper one whitely luminous.

"Damn!" said Young in a heartfelt manner. He searched the closet and tried on one hat after another. None would hide the halo. Certainly he could not enter a crowded bus in such a state.

A large furry object in a corner caught his gaze. He dragged it out and eyed the thing with loathing. It was a deformed, gigantic woolly headpiece, resembling a shako, which had once formed part of a masquerade costume. The suit itself had long since vanished, but the hat remained, to the comfort of Filthy, who sometimes slept on it.

Yet it would hide the halo. Gingerly Young drew the monstrosity on his head and crept toward the mirror. One glance was enough. Mouthing a brief prayer, he opened the door and fled.

CHOOSING between two evils is often difficult. More than once during that nightmare ride downtown Young decided he had made the wrong choice. Yet, somehow, he could not bring himself to tear off the hat and stamp it underfoot, though he was longing to do so. Huddled in a corner of the bus, he steadily contemplated his fingernails and wished he was dead. He heard titters and muffled laughter, and was conscious of probing glances riveted on his shrinking head.

A small child tore open the scar tissue on Young's heart and scrabbled about in the open wound with rosy, ruthless fingers.

"Mamma," said the small child piercingly, "look at the funny man."

"Yes, honey," came a woman's voice. "Be quiet."

"What's that on his head?" the brat demanded.

There was a significant pause. Finally the woman said, "Well, I don't really know," in a baffled manner.

"What's he got it on for?"

No answer.

"Mamma!"

"Yes, honey."

"Is he crazy?"

"Be quiet," said the woman, dodging the issue.

"But what *is* it?"

Young could stand it no longer. He arose and made his way with dignity through the bus, his glazed eyes seeing nothing. Standing on the outer platform, he kept his face averted from the fascinated gaze of the conductor.

As the vehicle slowed down Young felt a hand laid on his arm. He turned. The small child's mother was standing there, frowning.

"Well?" Young inquired snappishly.

"It's Billy," the woman said. "I try to keep nothing from him. Would you mind telling me just what that is on your head?"

"It's Rasputin's beard," Young grated. "He willed it to me." The man leaped from the bus and, ignoring a half-heard question from the still-puzzled woman, tried to lose himself in the crowd.

This was difficult. Many were intrigued by the remarkable hat. But, luckily, Young was only a few blocks from his office, and at last, breathing hoarsely, he stepped into the elevator, glared murderously at the operator, and said, "Ninth floor."

"Excuse me, Mr. Young," the boy said mildly. "There's something on your head."

"I know," Young replied. "I put it there."

This seemed to settle the question. But after the passenger had left the elevator, the boy grinned widely. When he saw the janitor a few minutes later he said:

"You know Mr. Young? The guy—"

"I know him. So what?"

"Drunk as a lord."

"Him? You're screwy."

"Tighter'n a drum," declared the youth, "swelp me Gawd."

MEANWHILE, the sainted Mr. Young made his way to the office of Dr. French, a physician whom he knew slightly, and who was conveniently located in the same building. He had not long to wait. The nurse, after one startled glance at the remarkable hat, vanished, and almost immediately reappeared to usher the patient into the inner sanctum.

Dr. French, a large, bland man with a waxed, yellow mustache, greeted Young almost effusively.

"Come in, come in. How are you today? Nothing wrong, I hope. Let me take your hat."

"Wait," Young said, fending off the physician. "First let me explain. There's something on my head."

"Cut, bruise or fracture?" the literal-minded doctor inquired. "I'll fix you up in a jiffy."

"I'm not *sick*," said Young. "At least, I hope not. I've got a . . . um . . . a halo."

"Ha, ha," Dr. French applauded. "A halo, eh? Surely you're not that good."

"Oh, the hell with it!" Young snapped, and snatched off his hat. The doctor retreated a step. Then, interested, he approached and tried to finger the halo. He failed.

"I'll be— This is odd," he said at last. "Does look rather like one, doesn't it?"

"What is it? That's what I want to know."

French hesitated. He plucked at his mustache. "Well, it's rather out of my line. A physicist might— No. Perhaps Mayo's. Does it come off?"

"Of course not. You can't even touch the thing."

"Ah. I see. Well, I should like some specialists' opinions. In the meantime, let me see—". There was orderly tumult. Young's heart, temperature, blood, saliva and epidermis were tested and approved.

At length French said: "You're fit as a fiddle. Come in tomorrow, at ten. I'll have some other specialists here then."

"You . . . uh . . . you can't get rid of this?"

"I'd rather not try just yet. It's obviously some form of radioactivity. A radium treatment may be necessary—"

Young left the man mumbling about alpha and gamma rays. Discouraged, he donned his strange hat and went down the hall to his own office.

The Atlas Advertising Agency was the most conservative of all advertising agencies. Two brothers with white whiskers had started the firm in 1820, and the company still seemed to wear dignified mental whiskers. Changes were frowned upon by the board of directors, who, in 1938, were finally convinced that radio had come to stay, and had accepted contracts for advertising broadcasts.

Once a junior vice president had been discharged for wearing a red necktie.

Young slunk into his office. It was vacant. He slid into his chair behind the desk, removed his hat, and gazed at it with loathing. The headpiece seemed to have grown even more horrid than it had appeared at first. It was shedding, and, moreover, gave off a faint but unmistakable aroma of unbathed Scotties.

After investigating the halo, and realizing that it was still firmly fixed in its place, Young turned to his work. But the Norns were casting baleful glances in his direction, for presently the door opened and Edwin G. Kipp, president of Atlas, entered. Young barely had time to duck his head beneath the desk and hide the halo.

KIPP was a small, dapper, and dignified man who wore pince-nez and Vandyke with the air of a reserved fish. His blood had long since been metamorphosed into ammonia. He moved, if not in beauty, at least in an almost visible auda of grim conservatism.

"Good morning, Mr. Young," he said. "Er . . . is that you?"

"Yes," said the invisible Young. "Good morning. I'm tying my shoelace."

To this Kipp made no reply save for an almost inaudible cough. Time passed. The desk was silent.

"Er . . . Mr. Young?"

"I'm . . . still here," said the wretched Young. "It's knotted. The shoelace, I mean. Did you want me?"

"Yes."

Kipp waited with gradually increasing impatience. There were no signs of a forthcoming emergence. The president considered the advisability of his advancing to the desk and peering under it. But the mental picture of a conversation conducted in so grotesque a manner was harrowing. He simply gave up and told Young what he wanted.

"Mr. Devlin has just telephoned," Kipp observed. "He will arrive shortly. He wishes to . . . er . . . to be shown the town, as he put it."

The invisible Young nodded. Devlin was one of their best clients. Or, rather, he had been until last year, when he suddenly began to do business with another firm, to the discomfiture of Kipp and the board of directors.

The president went on. "He told me he is hesitating about his new contract. He had planned to give it to World, but I had some correspondence with him on the matter, and suggested that a personal discussion might be of value.

So he is visiting our city, and wishes to go . . . er . . . sightseeing."

Kipp grew confidential. "I may say that Mr. Devlin told me rather definitely that he prefers a less conservative firm. 'Stodgy,' his term was. He will dine with me tonight, and I shall endeavor to convince him that our service will be of value. Yet"—Kipp coughed again—"yet dipolmacy is, of course, important. I should appreciate your entertaining Mr. Devlin today."

The desk had remained silent during this oration. Now it said convulsively: "I'm sick. I can't—"

"You are ill? Shall I summon a physician?"

Young hastily refused the offer, but remained in hiding. "No, I . . . but I mean—"

"You are behaving most strangely," Kipp said with commendable restraint. "There is something you should know, Mr. Young. I had not intended to tell you as yet, but . . . at any rate, the board has taken notice of you. There was a discussion at the last meeting. We have planned to offer you a vice presidency in the firm."

The desk was stricken dumb.

"You have upheld our standards for fifteen years," said Kipp. "There has been no hint of scandal attached to your name. I congratulate you, Mr. Young."

The president stepped forward, extending his hand. An arm emerged from beneath the desk, shook Kipp's, and quickly vanished.

Nothing further happened. Young tenaciously remained in his sanctuary. Kipp realized that, short of dragging the man out bodily, he could not hope to view an entire Kenneth Young for the present. With an admonitory cough he withdrew.

The miserable Young emerged, wincing as his cramped muscles relaxed. A pretty kettle of fish. How could he entertain Devlin while he wore a halo? And it was vitally necessary that Devlin be entertained, else the elusive vice presidency would be immediately withdrawn. Young knew only too well that employees of Atlas Advertising Agency trod a perilous pathway.

His reverie was interrupted by the sudden appearance of an angel atop the bookcase.

It was not a high bookcase, and the supernatural visitor sat there calmly enough, heels dangling and wings furled. A scanty robe of white samite made up the angel's wardrobe—that and a shining halo, at sight of which Young felt a wave of nausea sweep him.

"This," he said with rigid restraint, "is the end. A halo may be due to mass hypnotism. But when I start seeing angels—"

"Don't be afraid," said the other. "I'm real enough."

Young's eyes were wild. "How do I know? I'm obviously talking to empty air. It's schizo-something. Go away."

The angel wriggled his toes and looked embarrassed. "I can't, just yet. The fact is, I made a bad mistake. You may have noticed that you've a slight halo—"

Young gave a short, bitter laugh. "Oh, yes, I've *noticed* it."

Before the angel could reply the door opened. Kipp looked in, saw that Young was engaged, and murmured, "Excuse me," as he withdrew.

The angel scratched his golden curls. "Well, your halo was intended for somebody else—a Tibetan lama, in fact. But through a certain chain of circumstances I was led to believe that you were the candidate for sainthood. So—" The visitor made a comprehensive gesture.

Young was baffled. "I don't quite—"

"The lama . . . well, sinned. No sinner may wear a halo. And, as I say, I gave it to you through error."

"Then you can take it away again?" Amazed delight suffused Young's face. But the angel raised a benevolent hand.

"Fear not. I have checked with the recording angel. You have led a blameless life. As a reward, you will be permitted to keep the halo of sainthood."

The horrified man sprang to his feet, making feeble swimming motions with his arms. "But . . . but . . . but—"

"Peace and blessings be upon you," said the angel, and vanished.

YOUNG fell back into his chair and massaged his aching brow. Simultaneously the door opened and Kipp stood on the threshold. Luckily Young's hands temporarily hid the halo.

"Mr. Devlin is here," the president said. "Er . . . who was that on the bookcase?"

Young was too crushed to lie plausibly. He muttered, "An angel."

Kipp nodded in satisfaction. "Yes, of course. . . . *What?* You say an angel . . . an angel? Oh, my gosh!" The man turned quite white and hastily took his departure.

Young contemplated his hat. The thing still lay on the desk, wincing slightly under the baleful stare directed at it. To go through life wearing a halo was only less endurable than the thought of continually wearing the loathsome hat. Young brought his fist down viciously on the desk.

"I won't stand it! I . . . I don't have to—" He stopped abruptly. A dazed look grew in his eyes.

"I'll be . . . that's right! I don't *have* to stand it. If that lama got out of it . . . of course. 'No sinner may wear a halo.'" Young's round face twisted into a mask of sheer evil. "I'll be a sinner, then! I'll break all the Commandments—"

He pondered. At the moment he couldn't remember what they were. "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife." That was one.

Young thought of his neighbor's wife—a certain Mrs. Clay, a behemothic damsel of some fifty summers, with a face like a desiccated pudding. That was one Commandment he had no intention of breaking.

But probably one good, healthy sin would bring back the angel in a hurry to remove the halo. What crimes would result in the least inconvenience? Young furrowed his brow.

Nothing occurred to him. He decided to go for a walk. No doubt some sinful opportunity would present itself.

He forced himself to don the shako and had reached the elevator when a hoarse voice was heard hallooing after him. Racing along the hall was a fat man.

Young knew instinctively that this was Mr. Devlin.

The adjective "fat," as applied to Devlin, was a considerable understatement. The man bulged. His feet, strangled in biliously yellow shoes, burst out at the ankles like blossoming flowers. They merged into calves that seemed to gather momentum as they spread and mounted, flung themselves up with mad abandon, and revealed themselves in their complete, unrestrained glory at Devlin's middle. The man resembled, in silhouette, a pineapple with elephantiasis. A great mass of flesh poured out of his collar, forming a pale, sagging lump in which Young discerned some vague resemblance to a face.

Such was Devlin, and he charged along the hall, as mammoths thunder by, with earth-shaking tramplings of his crashing hoofs.

"You're Young!" he wheezed. "Almost missed me, eh? I was waiting in the office—" Devlin paused, his fascinated gaze upon the hat. Then, with an effort at politeness, he laughed falsely and glanced away. "Well, I'm all ready and r'aring to go."

Young felt himself impaled painfully on the horns of a dilemma. Failure to entertain Devlin would mean the loss

of that vice presidency. But the halo weighed like a flatiron on Young's throbbing head. One thought was foremost in his mind: he *had* to get rid of the blessed thing.

Once he had done that, he would trust to luck and diplomacy. Obviously, to take out his guest now would be fatal. insanity. The hat alone would be fatal.

"Sorry," Young grunted. "Got an important engagement. I'll be back for you as soon as I can."

Wheezing laughter, Devlin attached himself firmly to the other's arm. "No, you don't. You're showing me the town! Right now!" An unmistakable alcoholic odor was wafted to Young's nostrils. He thought quickly.

"All right," he said at last. "Come along. There's a bar downstairs. We'll have a drink, eh?"

"Now you're talking," said the jovial Devlin, almost incapacitating Young with a comradely slap on the back. "Here's the elevator."

THEY crowded into the cage. Young shut his eyes and suffered as interested stares were directed upon the hat. He fell into a state of coma, arousing only at the ground floor, where Devlin dragged him out and into the adjacent bar.

Now Young's plan was this: he would pour drink after drink down his companion's capacious gullet, and await his chance to slip away unobserved. It was a shrewd scheme, but it had one flaw—Devlin refused to drink alone.

"One for you and one for me," he said. "That's fair. Have another."

Young could not refuse, under the circumstances. The worst of it was that Devlin's liquor seemed to seep into every cell of his huge body, leaving him, finally, in the same state of glowing happiness which had been his originally. But poor Young was, to put it as charitably as possible, tight.

He sat quietly in a booth, glaring across at Devlin. Each time the waiter arrived, Young knew that the man's eyes were riveted upon the hat. And each round made the thought of that more irritating.

Also, Young worried about his halo. He brooded over sins. Arson, burglary, sabotage, and murder passed in quick review through his befuddled mind. Once he attempted to snatch the waiter's change, but the man was too alert. He laughed pleasantly and placed a fresh glass before Young.

The latter eyed it with distaste. Suddenly coming to a decision, he arose and wavered toward the door. Devlin overtook him on the sidewalk.

"What's the matter? Let's have another—"

"I have work to do," said Young with painful distinctness. He snatched a walking cane from a passing pedestrian and made threatening gestures with it until the remonstrating victim fled hurriedly. Hefting the stick in his hand, he brooded blackly.

"But why work?" Devlin inquired largely. "Show me the town."

"I have important matters to attend to." Young scrutinized a small child who had halted by the curb and was returning the stare with interest. The tot looked remarkably like the brat who had been so insulting on the bus.

"What's important?" Devlin demanded. "Important matters, eh? Such as what?"

"Beating small children," said Young, and rushed upon the startled child, brandishing his cane. The youngster uttered a shrill scream and fled. Young pursued for a few feet and then became entangled with a lamp-post. The lamp-post was impolite and dictatorial. It refused to allow Young to pass. The man remonstrated and, finally, argued, but to no avail.

The child had long since disappeared. Administering a brusque and snappy re-

buke to the lamp-post, Young turned away.

"What in Pete's name are you trying to do?" Devlin inquired. "That cop's looking at us. Come along." He took the other's arm and led him along the crowded sidewalk.

"What am I trying to do?" Young sneered. "It's obvious, isn't it? I wish to sin."

"Er . . . sin?"

"Sin."

"Why?"

Young tapped his hat meaningly, but Devlin put an altogether wrong interpretation on the gesture. "You're nuts?"

"Oh, shut up," Young snapped in a sudden burst of rage, and thrust his cane between the legs of a passing bank president whom he knew slightly. The unfortunate man fell heavily to the cement, but arose without injury save to his dignity.

"I beg your pardon!" he barked.

Young was going through a strange series of gestures. He had fled to a show-window mirror and was doing fantastic things to his hat, apparently trying to lift it in order to catch a glimpse of the top of his head—a sight, it seemed, to be shielded jealously from profane eyes. At length he cursed loudly, turned, gave the bank president a contemptuous stare, and hurried away, trailing the puzzled Devlin like a captive balloon.

Young was muttering thickly to himself.

"Got to sin—really sin. Something big. Burn down an orphan asylum. Kill m' mother-in-law. Kill . . . anybody!" He looked quickly at Devlin, and the latter shrank back in sudden fear. But finally Young gave a disgusted grunt.

"Nrgh. Too much blubber. Couldn't use a gun or a knife. Have to blast—Look!" Young said, clutching Devlin's arm. "Stealing's a sin, isn't it?"

"Sure is," the diplomatic Devlin agreed. "But you're not—"

Young shook his head. "No. Too crowded here. No use going to jail. Come on!"

HE plunged forward. Devlin followed. And Young fulfilled his promise to show his guest the town, though afterward neither of them could remember exactly what had happened. Presently Devlin paused in a liquor store for refueling, and emerged with bottles protruding here and there from his clothing.

Hours merged into an alcoholic haze. Life began to assume an air of foggy unreality to the unfortunate Devlin. He sank presently into a coma, dimly conscious of various events which marched with celerity through the afternoon and long into the night. Finally he roused himself sufficiently to realize that he was standing with Young confronting a wooden Indian which stood quietly outside a cigar store. It was, perhaps, the last of the wooden Indians. The outworn relic of a bygone day, it seemed to stare with faded glass eyes at the bundle of wooden cigars it held in an extended hand.

Young was no longer wearing a hat. And Devlin suddenly noticed something decidedly peculiar about his companion.

He said softly, "You've got a halo."

Young started slightly. "Yes," he replied, "I've got a halo. This Indian—" He paused.

Devlin eyed the image with disfavor. To his somewhat fuzzy brain the wooden Indian appeared even more horrid than the surprising halo. He shuddered and hastily averted his gaze.

"Stealing's a sin," Young said under his breath, and then, with an elated cry, stooped to lift the Indian. He fell immediately under its weight, emitting a

string of smoking oaths as he attempted to dislodge the incubus.

"Heavy," he said, rising at last. "Give me a hand."

Devlin had long since given up any hope of finding sanity in this madman's actions. Young was obviously determined to sin, and the fact that he possessed a halo was somewhat disquieting, even to the drunken Devlin. As a result, the two men proceeded down the street, bearing with them the rigid body of a wooden Indian.

The proprietor of the cigar shop came out and looked after them, rubbing his hands. His eyes followed the departing statue with unmitigated joy.

"For ten years I've tried to get rid of that thing," he whispered gleefully. "And now . . . aha!"

He re-entered the store and lit a Corona to celebrate his emancipation.

Meanwhile, Young and Devlin found a taxi stand. One cab stood there; the driver sat puffing a cigarette and listening to his radio. Young hailed the man.

"Cab, sir?" The driver sprang to life, bounced out of the car, and flung open the door. Then he remained frozen in a half-crouching position, his eyes revolving wildly in their sockets.

He had never believed in ghosts. He was, in fact, somewhat of a cynic. But in the face of a bulbous ghoul and a decadent angel bearing the stiff corpse of an Indian, he felt with a sudden, blinding shock of realization that beyond life lies a black abyss teaming with horror unimaginable. Whining shrilly, the terrified man leaped back into his cab, got the thing into motion, and vanished as smoke before the gale.

YOUNG and Devlin looked at one another ruefully.

"What now?" the latter asked

"Well," said Young, "I don't live far from here. Only ten blocks or so. Come on!"

It was very late, and few pedestrians were abroad. These few, for the sake of their sanity, were quite willing to ignore the wanderers and go their separate ways. So eventually Young, Devlin, and the wooden Indian arrived at their destination.

The door of Young's home was locked, and he could not locate the key. He was curiously averse to arousing Jill. But, for some strange reason, he felt it vitally necessary that the wooden Indian be concealed. The cellar was the logical place. He dragged his two companions to a basement window, smashed it as quietly as possible, and slid the image through the gap.

"Do you really live here?" asked Devlin, who had his doubts.

"Hush!" Young said warningly. "Come on!"

He followed the wooden Indian, landing with a crash in a heap of coal. Devlin joined him after much wheezing and grunting. It was not dark. The halo provided about as much illumination as a twenty-five-watt globe.

Young left Devlin to nurse his bruises and began searching for the wooden Indian. It had unaccountably vanished. But he found it at last cowering beneath a washtub, dragged the object out, and set it up in a corner. Then he stepped back and faced it, swaying a little.

"That's a sin, all right," he chuckled. "Theft. It isn't the amount that matters. It's the principle of the thing. A wooden Indian is just as important as a million dollars, eh, Devlin?"

"I'd like to chop that Indian into fragments," said Devlin with passion. "You made me carry it for three miles." He paused, listening. "What in heaven's name is that?"

A small tumult was approaching. Filthy, having been instructed often in

his duties as a watchdog, now faced opportunity. Noises were proceeding from the cellar. Burglars, no doubt. The raffish Scotty cascaded down the stairs in a babel of frightful threats and oaths. Loudly declaring his intention of eviscerating the intruders, he flung himself upon Young, who made hasty clucking sounds intended to soothe the Scotty's aroused passions.

Filthy had other ideas. He spun like a dervish, yelling bloody murder. Young wavered, made a vain snatch at the air, and fell prostrate to the ground. He remained face down, while Filthy, seeing the halo, rushed at it and trampled upon his master's head.

The wretched Young felt the ghosts of a dozen and more drinks rising to confront him. He clutched at the dog, missed, and gripped instead the feet of the wooden Indian. The image swayed perilously. Filthy cocked up an apprehensive eye and fled down the length of his master's body, pausing halfway as he remembered his duty. With a muffled curse he sank his teeth into the nearest portion of Young and attempted to yank off the miserable man's pants.

Meanwhile, Young remained face down, clutching the feet of the wooden Indian in a despairing grip.

There was a resounding clap of thunder. White light blazed through the cellar. The angel appeared.

Devlin's legs gave way. He sat down in a plump heap, shut his eyes, and began chattering quietly to himself. Filthy swore at the intruder, made an unsuccessful attempt to attain a firm grasp on one of the gently fanning wings, and went back to think it over, arguing throatily. The wing had an unsatisfying lack of substantiality.

The angel stood over Young with golden fires glowing in his eyes, and a benign look of pleasure molding his noble features. "This," he said quietly, "shall be taken as a symbol of your first successful good deed since your enhaloment." A wingtip brushed the dark and grimy visage of the Indian. Forthwith, there was no Indian. "You have lightened the heart of a fellow man—little, to be sure, but some, and at a cost of much labor on your part.

"For a day you have struggled with this sot to redeem him, but for this no success has rewarded you, albeit the morrow's pains will afflict you.

"Go forth, K. Young, rewarded and protected from all sin alike by your halo." The youngest angel faded quietly, for which alone Young was grateful. His head was beginning to ache and he'd feared a possible thunderous vanishment.

Filthy laughed nastily, and renewed his attack on the halo. Young found the unpleasant act of standing upright necessary. While it made the walls and tubs spin round like all the hosts of heaven, it made impossible Filthy's dervish dance on his face.

SOME time later he awoke, cold sober and regretful of the fact. He lay between cool sheets, watching morning sunlight lance through the windows, his eyes, and feeling it splinter in jagged bits in his brain. His stomach was making spasmodic attempts to leap up and squeeze itself out through his burning throat.

Simultaneous with awakening came realization of three things: the pains of the morrow had indeed afflicted him; the halo mirrored still in the glass above the dressing table—and the parting words of the angel.

He groaned a heartfelt triple groan. The headache would pass, but the halo, he knew, would not. Only by sinning could one become unworthy of it, and—shining protector!—it made him unlike other men. His deeds must all be good, his works a help to men. He could not sin!

The Moving Finger Writes,

---AND HAVING WRIT---

Unknown club for Clevelanders.

Dear Editor:

If Robert Bloch, young as he is, can write a work like "The Cloak" for Unknown, then I am a lifelong fan, waiting for more superlative creations from his extraordinary imagination.

My friends and myself are attempting to form a club to discuss the contents of Unknown. Every reader of Unknown living in Cleveland and vicinity is hereby invited to co-operate in the formation of this organization.

John W. Campbell, Jr., deserves an Insignia of Service, for his efforts in supervising Unknown.—Allen R. Baker, 3562 E. 140th St., Cleveland, Ohio.

From the author of "Strange Gateway."

Dear Mr. Campbell:

Just noted L. Sprague de Camp's long and interesting letter. His remarks on *yogi* and *yoga* leave me without any dissenting observations; without having checked any occult glossaries, lexicons in Pali or Sanskrit, I can't argue, and I think, moreover, that he is dead right in his distinctions. However, on my desk is a book entitled "Fourteen Lessons In Yogi Philosophy and Oriental Occultism"—the back of the book has the condensed title, "Yogi Philosophy." It is by Yogi Ramacharaka—this being in accord with De Camp's note. Publishers' note also contains usage, "yogi philosophy." I cited the title, in my manuscript, just as given on the book; the Yogi Publication Society is "guilty" this time. In other words, I seem to have quoted accurately a publisher's error. Not that I consider this a refutation; merely comment on a reader's interesting comment. Perhaps you'd like to pass this along, as his remarks indicate that he might be interested in the facts.—E. Hoffmann Price, Redwood City, Calif.

Tadamona wasn't susceptible to *fire*—it was the *light* of the flares that destroyed him.

Dear Sir:

The analysis of the last issue of Unknown follows: Cover: Very good. Excellent fantasy and portrayal.

"Returned From Hell"—B-. Good plot but undeveloped. A very weak Satan.

"Danger In The Dark"—B+. Good native lore and excellent treatment of man against the supernatural that is necessary for fantasy. However, this being and the Jinn in "The Ultimate Adventure" were both susceptible to fire. Don't run into the ground the inflammability idea.

"The Missing Ocean"—A-. Good science fiction—not fantasy. However not true to ship captains as a whole.

"The Cloak"—B+. A *different* vampire story.
"The Piping Death"—C–. No reason for inclusion in Unknown. Not even good adventure.
"Whatever"—C–. Poor development.
"Divide and Rule"—A–. A fine ending to a good story. The helmet idea for increasing mental power is a possibility today.

I especially liked the department headings. "—And Having Writ—" best one I have ever seen. Illustration excellent. I am sorry to say the inside illustrations for the stories are poor. There is nothing to indicate a *story* in them. Perhaps they did not strike me in the right mood. What about a better scene from the story for the illustration?—Thomas S. Gardner, 903 John Jay Hall, Columbia University, New York, N. Y.

Pure inductive science—

Dear Sir:

In the June issue of your magazine, Unknown, there was published a letter from L. Sprague de Camp concerning the science of Yoga. I would suggest that this person do more research before defining a science of which he knows little or nothing.

Although Yoga is generally considered a philosophy, its active practice constitutes a science as exacting as any. The philosophy is based on the theory that all knowledge, and consequently all power, may be obtained by deep introspection. The science consists of placing the body in a condition where external influences won't distract it. This science has been carefully worked out by centuries of experimentation, and I can assure you that conditions detrimental to mind and body do not result from the proper practice of Yoga. Besides correct breathing, diet and exercise play an important part in developing the Yogi.

Perhaps the foregoing has been awkwardly put, but I believe that it will give one a little better idea as to what the true science of Yoga is about.

Now for a few words concerning your magazine. Others may start a trend, but leave it to Street & Smith to put out a magazine with true cosmopolitan appeal. The June issue was my first taste of Unknown, but the taste was so satisfactory that I know that I will come back for more. Keep it just like it is. One long novel is enough if it is like N. W. Page's "Flame Winds."

Let me say in closing that this is the first time I have ever written to a magazine, and I probably wouldn't have written this time except for Mr. de Camp's misinformed opinion of Yoga. This happens to be my hobby, and I am rather touchy about misinformation regarding it. Incidentally, if Mr. de Camp would like more information on the subject, I would be glad to correspond with him.—Sri Ira Hensley, 2204 Crawford St., Houston, Texas.

De Camp and H. L. Gold cooperate on next month's long "None But Lucifer."

Dear Mr. Campbell:

The June Unknown rises almost to the great standard set by the first issue, and that's saying something.

I marvel that L. Sprague de Camp can turn out a swell story like "Divide and Rule," and then in the very next issue have such a magnificent story as "The Gnarly Man."

If this story doesn't become a classic like "The Moon Pool" and others, I'll eat every issue of Unknown you don't sell for the next ten years!

Scott is doing good work on the covers, although on the June issue, every Chinese is quite cross-eyed.

Keep Cartier, Orban and Mayan on the inside—and why not give Bjorklund a chance?

Give us more slick paper, more De Camp and above all more—Unknown.—Jerry Bixby, Apt. F52, 3433 90th St., Jackson Heights, L. I., New York.

Exercise—for body and mind.

Dear Mr. Campbell:

I'm sorry to see Mr. de Camp's attack on Yoga in your fine magazine for it is obvious he's only skimmed the surface in his study of Yoga.

Those breathing exercises:

Many of these practiced by the Yurus are part of physical training routine. Some are almost a necessity for hypnosis.

Voice culture is another name for a set of these breathing exercises used by singers to develop voice and tone.

Also, the headstands and "assorted postures" are all known to physical training enthusiasts. All these are well known for strengthening the body and loosening the bony frame.

And lastly, wise men in India wouldn't practice Yoga all these thousands of years without accruing some benefit.

Mr. de Camp, don't think I dislike you in any way. I derived much pleasure from your serial "Divide and Rule," but I didn't like the matter-of-fact way you passed over Yoga. Science hasn't explained everything.—Leslie Turner, 45 Maltravers Terr., Sheffield, 2, England.

When Greek meets Greek!

Dear Editor:

I have read Street & Smith's new magazine, Unknown, with considerable interest. The stories include enough of the lighter aspects of the unseen forces to keep the magazine from falling altogether under the "Horror" classification; some of them have a good occult "feel."

In the May issue, I think "The Cloak," and "Whatever" are darned well done. "Returned From Hell" is a good story-idea, all right, but the author—it seems to me—loses the weirdness of the idea in the effort to tell a story with lurid setting. Many fine points in it, but the Devil wasn't as elusive as the devils of my acquaintance, so he wasn't too convincing. However, I haven't sold one yet myself, so—

"The Missing Ocean" was excellent in idea, but gave the impression that the hero died to save the author's imagination.

"Danger In The Dark" was one of the best in its line I have read, with very few points of incredibility to mar it.

I have often wondered why the "unknown" should invariably be associated with things purely fantastic and satanic, when every mystic and every occultist knows that there is an extremely beautiful aspect of the "over yonder"? And a very definite and scientific connection with the "over here"?—R. M. MacAlpin, Rt. 1, Box 623, Pasadena, Calif.

Well—how would you end "The Hexer"?

Dear Mr. Campbell:

REPORT ON JUNE, 1939, UNKNOWN
(five-star maximum)

1—"Flame Winds," by Norvell W. Page—Four and a half stars.

Wow, some yarn! Usually I gaze askance at blood and thunder yarns which feature a superhuman hero who beats the unbeatable—but not this time. Three cheers for Prester John and let's have a serial. No doubt Page had a serial in mind, since Prester John has not yet fulfilled his vow of 100,000 bowing to Christ. So LET'S HAVE IT.

2—"The Gnarly Man," by L. Sprague de Camp—Four and a half stars.

I'm getting so that I'm practically nuts over anything De Camp writes. He is *such* easy and interesting reading that I lose my

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perspective and go off into torrents of praise on the slightest provocation. I wish, though, De Camp had allowed Dr. Saddler to catch the Neanderthaler. It would be interesting to see what would happen.

3—"The Hexer," by H. W. Guernsey—Four stars.

Interesting and humorous, but I thought it was rather mean of Guernsey to allow the story to end with everyone still under the spell. It gives you a feeling of frustration because, of course, I was looking forward to an ending where everything was hunky-dory again.

4—"Parole," by Thomas Calvert McClary—Three stars.

Rather pathetic, but there was an air of incredibility about it. I just couldn't see convicts acting like that. The most interesting part of the yarn was not Two Ton and his "escape mechanism" but Soupy and the way he humored Two Ton.

5—"Don't Go Haunting," by Robert Coley—Three Stars.

I was expecting that ending almost from the beginning of the story. No other was possible. I liked the rather bawdy humor of it.

6—"The Summons," by Don Evans—Two and a half stars.

I caught on to what was going on before the story ended and that saved it for me. I'm just not the type for these psychological horror yarns. They're too subtle for my frank, ingenuous temperament. I'm too much the mental child. Give me the L. Ron Hubbard fairy tale any time and I'm happy.

7—"The Right Ear of Malchus," by J. Allan Dunn—Two stars.

Let's please not cater to superstition. When we get serious about the "unknown," we're liable to lose our sense of values, so let's joke around with it. Old gypsy magic amulets, forsooth! I know—"there are more things on heaven and earth—" Shakespeare's most harmful quotation that. It aids and abets superstition.

8—Cover—One star.

Imagine that mess of Mongoloid faces staring at one. It gives me the willies!

9—General.

The readers' department should be longer, but I guess you'll come to that, when the letters begin flowing.—Isaac Asimov, 174 Windsor Pl., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Well, of course it's your business too.

Dear Mr. Campbell:

Unknown is the first fantasy magazine that I've succeeded in enjoying. Your promise of entertainment I was forced to salt heavily before swallowing; the recent examples have

slid down my mental gullet with ease and flavor. I don't like weird stuff. I don't believe in godlings, demons, vampires, or the assorted whathaveyou of superstition. The serious, heavy portrayal of suchlike things in the straight weirds didn't go over.

I liked "The Hexer." I don't believe in hexing, personally, but I am thoroughly willing to admit its existence and effectiveness for so thoroughly and completely amusing a yarn as that. Likewise I can't wholly believe that a Neanderthal man is still living—but if he is, he must be strikingly like unto Aloysius of "The Gnarly Man." De Camp had a lovely little yarn there.

In general, the approach of Unknown to the fantasy field is, even as you promised, different. A sort of "take this premise for a while as true, and let's see the fun we can have" attitude. L. Ron Hubbard's "The Ultimate Adventure" was that—with a shade too much elaboration on the development and proving of the premise, I thought. You know, I have a sort of mental backing off every time some one insults my intelligence by trying to "prove" some utterly incredible thing actually happened. I'm willing to take most anything as a premise, but I'll be darned if I'll have anybody try to bulldoze me into taking it for gospel fact with some such thing as "He wondered if it had all been a dream, but he saw that *there was a scar across his little finger,* and knew it must be true!"

You haven't had that in Unknown yet. Don't.

Your long novels have, so far, been far and away better than anything I've seen in any other fantasy-type magazine—and I hope you'll keep them that way. It rather seems to me that the adventure angle or the action-mystery makes the best field for long, fantasy novels. "Returned From Hell" I thought your weakest, largely because it was based on pure fantasy. "Flame Winds" was excellent, because it had a touch of fantasy to spice it, and a barbaric swing of action to sweep it along. "The Ultimate Adventure" was of the action-against-fantasy type, and very good. "Sinister Barrier," of course, stands out as unique in every way—and not likely of quick duplication. But that was the action-mystery with the fantasy element type I referred to.

"Divide and Rule!" wasn't a type; it was a little gem set out in its own, private niche, all by itself. It was one of the most delightfully topsy-turvy things I've read in years; it was a sort of Lewis Carrol nonsense-made-sensible by means of a cockeyed viewpoint on life. If De Camp can only give us another window into that delightful if cockeyed scene, I'd love it, myself. Sir Howard van Slyck should have some amusing adventures trying to turn crusty old knights in armor into good Democrats and Republicans. Also, it occurs to me, minds trained as those of these knights had been, would put some remarkable interpretations on some phases of our modern law, which they could undoubtedly find intact in the Hopper libraries.

Law is amusingly cockeyed anyway, in a number of instances, and the slightly batty slant that Sir Howard displayed at various times, combined with the consciously obtuse and legalistic mind that De Camp displays with such entertaining results, should give a nice sequel.

Incidentally, we've had Greek and Roman mythology, Arabic mythology, European mythology—in the vampire—but we're still shy on Irish and Norse myths. How about those lovely two-fisted, hard-headed old Norse gods? And how about a few of the rather mischievous Irish mythological characters? The Norse myths should make some fine novels, I'd say, and the Irish should yield more than one good short.

But kindly steer well clear of the inextricable tangle of worried and worrying little gods, godlings, devils, spirits, medicine men and wizards of North, South, East and West Africa, the South Seas, and all points East. You can include in that *index expurgitorius* the American mythologies, both Indian, Mayan and Aztec as far as I'm concerned. I don't know anything about 'em, and feel severely griped when somebody discusses them learnedly and vaguely. To enjoy them, I've got to know something about them, and Unknown isn't a textbook of mythology—or shouldn't be.

If an author insists on strange gods, let him make up his own. I don't mind that, partly, I guess, because he can't discourse on them any more learnedly than I can. He doesn't know anything about them either, and neither does anybody else.

But this discussion of African godlings reminds me of attending a meeting of old friends who start off on a long series of "Oh, and remember the time—", the time always being one when I wasn't there and *don't* remember. It's all right for them, but I object to being left out in the cold.

Now, having told you explicitly how to run your business, I'll sign off.

Anyway, if you maintain the level you've held since Unknown started, I'm going to keep following your business. I like it!—Charles Drew, 82 Blagden Street, Boston, Mass.

RETURNED FROM HELL?

ON the north bank of the River Thames, between Henley and Windsor, lies the ruined old Abbey of Medmenham—pronounced "Mednum." In 1763 it was overshadowed by enormous elms that were beautiful or sinister, depending on the time of day and the prejudices of the beholder.

On an evening in 1763 light and sound came from the abbey. The owner of the property, a Buckinghamshire squire with the faintly improbable name of Sir Francis Dashwood, was entertaining his friends and fellow lechers. This Dashwood, a genial ox of a man, had collected a dozen cronies who shared his liking for jolly obscenity into a society that called itself the Medmenham Monks, and which the countryfolk called the Hell-Fire Club. It included such people as George Walpole, third Earl of Orford and nephew of Horace Walpole, the century's great loafer and letter writer; Thomas Potter, who had by extravagant feats of depravity tried to live down the fact that his father had been Archbishop of Canterbury; and the cross-eyed, horse-faced John Wilkes, Whig politician and reformer, who combined the private morals of Dashwood, et cetera, with a—for his time—phenomenal honesty and strength of character in public affairs.

On this occasion Dashwood's fancy had run to devil worship. An amusement of the club was parodying Roman Catholic ritual. Only a brief account of what happened has come down to us; we may fill out the picture with our imaginations.

The chapel is lit by candles, which show a dozen men in wigs, jack-boots, and long many-buttoned coats. Dashwood, a nervous grin on his round face, is urging Lord Orford to put on a monk's robe.

"Come on, George! Must have proper formality, you know, or his majesty mightn't like it. Damme, I do think you're afeared!"

The young man takes the robe. He smirks at Churchill, the unfrocked preacher and mediocre poet. "How did you do it last time, Charlie?"

"Well," rumbles Churchill, "you take some common prayer—here, I have a book—and substitute 'Satan' for 'God,' you see, like this—"

"Come on, lads," drawls Wilkes, "I'm getting bored. The girls are, too, I fancy."

Lord Orford finally gets himself into a kneeling position. He mumbles slowly through the prayer book, as the light is poor and Lord Orford is a stupid young man.

The candles flicker, and shadows play tag on the walls. With the faintest squeak, the lid of an old chest rises, and something comes out. It is manlike, but about half the size of a man; black, horned and hairy, with bat wings and fangs. It leaps onto a table, then onto Lord Orford's shoulders.

Orford's terrified scream cuts through the rising babel of "The Devil!" *"The Devil!"* "THE DEVIL!" The other gentlemen are fighting to get out, and getting tangled in their swords. Lord Orford claws at the awful thing on his back with yells audible in the village of Marlowe.

Dashwood pulls himself together and tries to dislodge the demon. A kick in the ribs sends it scurrying through a window. Shrieks from the garden suggest that a couple of rustics who have crept up to see the fun are getting more than they expected.

Then, silence, except for the diminishing sound of men running. Dashwood bends over Lord Orford, who is lying with glazed eyes and spittle running down his chin.

"He's not hurt," says Wilkes, "only frightened."

Dashwood looks suspiciously at Wilkes. "Damme, Jack, I'll swear you're laughing. You did this?" He goes over to the chest. "I see! A string fixed to the lid, so you could open it from where you knelt. What was the thing? An ape?"

Wilkes is rocking on a bench. "A dog-faced baboon! The horns and wings I tied on him. Did you see Lord Sandwich's face? I'll wager he'll not stop running till he reaches London!"

Dashwood growls angrily: "It's a joke to you, no doubt, but the poor lad here is like to go out of his mind. It'll be long before I try such a thing again."

The Hell-Fire Club never did meet again. By the time the "Monks'" nerves had calmed sufficiently, political differences among them had caused the group to break up.

Lord Orford seemingly recovered, but ten years later went definitely mad. Which suggests that Satan worship is not a good idea. Even if you don't raise the Devil, you may get a more impressive substitute than is good for your peace of mind.

L. S. DE CAMP.

In the September UNKNOWN, "None But Lucifer," by L. Sprague de Camp and H. L. Gold, and "Over the Border," by Eric Frank Russell. Two pieces carefully selected to make the world seem a less happy, placid place!

Continued from page 74

"A brave man is not a brave man without a brave soul. I had one such. And you let him go . . . but it is doubtful if you could ever have mastered him. I knew he was thoroughly bad, but cared little about that.

"A cunning fellow has his uses if his soul is truly cunning. I had one such . . . and now he is released. Too sharp, much too sharp, for you to hold.

"And then there was Tommy. A clever soul who lived for nothing but structure and died for it and would have lived for it again under my gentle guidance. What palaces he could have built for me! And you released him as well.

"And the Englishman! An ass, my adventurous one, but a soldier! What armies he could have trained for me! What empires would have fallen before my steely troops. Ah, yesss, the soul of a soldier, always complaining but always exact. Always mindful of his duty, always with his sense of fitness.

"Yesss! My staff was collected. I waited for nothing but my boat to carry me back to my own country. I have missed it because of you, but there is another in a week, and I, of course, shall go on it, with all my six souls secure in that trunk. For I shall get them back. Indeed I shall! They can easily be traced, and you, whether you wish it or not, will aid me.

"But do not wonder where you are going, for that is all decided. I have no room for curiosity in my plans, no matter how adventurous it might be or how strong its bearer.

"Souls are peculiar things. All material things are mere energy, made of atoms, made of electrons, made of energy. But souls— Far more indestructible, I assure you, and of far finer stuff. But I . . . I know how to destroy them, even as I know how to give them material powers."

HE fell silent once more and thoughtfully regarded the rug between his boots. A shaft of sunlight eventually wandered through the window and he moved as soon as he became aware of it, shifting his chair to a dark corner from which his eyes glowed forth.

"Yesss," he said at last, having reached a decision. "That is best. The elevator boy was suspicious. Yesss. I shall move my trunk to yet another hotel and from there we will go forth to track down my pretty prizes. Yesss." He looked toward Irish. "Put my clothes in the black bag and do not forget the slippers under the edge of the bed."

Irish tried to stay where he was, but presently he found himself moving from place to place, picking up pieces of clothing and sailing them back to the black bag. He opened the drawers in the bureau one by one and took out their slight contents, and soon he had everything in readiness.

"The slippers!" said the ghoul.

Irish dared not take his eyes away from the fellow, and so watched him as he neared the bed. He groped for the slippers and succeeded in knocking one back out of reach. This necessitated his lifting the coverlet to retrieve it, and he reached out to haul it closer to him.

That failing, he himself slid down through mattress and springs and gave it a punch which knocked it out into the room.

And he would have followed it if he had not beheld a thing which made him momentarily forget the bitter wind which continually labored him.

What was that thing which crackled when it was moved?

"Yesss," the ghoul was saying to himself. "That is best. This room has made me uneasy. Perhaps someone suspects. If there is another hotel close to the dock I shall go there—"

Irish stared at what he had found. He was in terror of touching it for fear of the consequences. But it came to him that all that was left of him—and little enough that was—would vanish forever, anyhow, if he did not chance it.

He stretched out his invisible hand toward the packet, blessing the indifferent chamber service of the hotel, blessing the careless chambermaid who liked dust two inches thick beneath the bed of every guest. And he blessed the terror which had inspired him on the fatal day he had opened the trunk, the terror which had caused him to throw away the packet he had clutched.

In a moment he had it. In another he straightened up. And in a third the ghoul, conscious that something was suddenly wrong, had glanced at him.

The ghoul leaped up and started back with a gasp. He backed to the wall, staring and shivering.

"Rue!" he cried. "You fiend! Whence, by the name of Shaitan, came that rue?"

Irish gripped the package tightly, but even to him it only hung in midair. He shook so that he could scarce retain it.

"That is why," gibbered the ghoul. "That is the cause! I dared not stay here and had to force myself to wait for you! And *that*," he cried with a shudder, "was the poison in this room! Put it down, you fool! Do you want to shrivel me?"

Irish had all he could do to keep from obeying, so great was the power the ghoul still had over him.

"It's poison! It's liable to kill you as well! Poison, you witless ape! Throw it out the window!"

Irish started toward the window, and only with great effort did he check himself. He turned toward the ghoul, but it was like a diver striving to wade through a strong current. The wind screamed about him and drove him away.

Summoning up all the will he had, Irish persevered. Ahead was the little hall which led to the door. If he could only force himself—

"Stand back from there!" cried the ghoul.

Irish labored forward, growing weaker. But he came closer to both the door and the ghoul. The latter shrank inch by inch toward the windows to keep distance between himself and the rue and the violence of its poison.

The ghoul saw what a difficult struggle it was and took heart. "Put it down!" he cried. "Put it down, I say! Get into the trunk!"

Irish struggled against the wind. Inch by inch he neared the egress. Inch by inch he strained against the gale. The ghoul circled and came behind him so that Irish had to turn and force him back. He lost a foot or two in the operation and faced around once more to recover his ground.

The strength was ebbing from him rapidly. The clamoring beast behind him was robbing him of his power. But the door came within a yard, within two feet, within six inches. And he battled on.

SUDDENLY—he could not tell how it happened—without touching knob or chain, he was out in the hall. With suddenness the velocity of the wind decreased. He shot up the hall from force of habit and leaped into the stairway to swoop down flight after flight, touching nothing at all.

Tightly he held the package before him, and it grew upon him that he was doing a dangerous thing. He had no way to hide this material object and it could not but present a curious sight, traveling along without visible means of locomotion. Certainly someone would grab at it sooner or later, and if he lost it—

He reached the lobby and stopped, melting halfway back through the last door to survey the ground before him. The cigar counter was closed up, indicating Becky's withdrawal to private tears.

Fred, looking none too unhappy, was deep in conversation with Georgie. Mr. Snide prowled restlessly up and down as though waiting for someone. After a little he saw somebody coming through the foyer and brightened.

A black conveyance had backed up to the edge of the awning and two men were getting out of it. They reached into the car and brought out a wicker basket which tapered in thickness. Thus equipped and looking very bored, they trudged into the lobby where Mr. Snide bustled up to welcome them.

"Where's th' stiff?" said the morgue officer with the flat, dismal countenance.

"Right in here, gentlemen. Ah . . . would you mind hurrying? The basket, you know, and the recent excitement. Very bad for the trade. Right in here, gentlemen." And he slid open the door of the freight elevator, disclosing the crumpled body.

"Bullet, maybe?" said the other morgue officer, whose demeanor was very blithe and hopeful. "Been a long time since we had a murder, huh, Joe?"

"Had one last night," growled Joe.

"Yeah, but that wasn't no bullet murder," said the other.

"He dropped dead from starvation," said Mr. Snide. "He was employed here once."

"You oughta feed 'em better," growled Joe.

"Starvation?" said the other hopefully. "Maybe he was in love, huh? And he pined away." He sighed deeply and looked very pleased. "How about that, Joe? Pined away. She wouldn't have him an'—"

"He was out of a job," said Mr. Snide swiftly. "Please, gentlemen, there is a crowd gathering."

"Take his feet, Tawser," growled Joe, unstrapping the basket and taking off the lid.

"Ain't it too bad," said Tawser, "she wouldn't have him." He sighed again as they lowered the body into the basket.

Joe seemed to be having trouble getting the straps in place. "Oughta use that bigger one," growled Joe. "This's three in two days that wouldn't make no fit. Sit on it, Tawser."

Tawser sat upon it, and Joe got the buckle and strap to meet. They swung the burden up and marched with it through the foyer, past a morbid throng, and thrust it into the back of their wagon.

Irish saw the crowd, but he also saw that the conveyance was leaving. Shaking with the chill, he made up his mind and moved out into the lobby.

He made it halfway through the crowd before anybody saw the mysteriously suspended packet. It had barely touched a rather plump gentleman who gazed at it with total lack of comprehension.

Swiftly Irish jerked it back. The plump gentleman started so violently

that he jarred those on either side of him, who instantly spun about—already tense at the business of seeing a corpse removed—and after a moment, located the strange packet.

Irish rushed forward toward the door, but he felt a hand paw at his burden. He struggled to retain it, facing around and yelling, wholly unheard.

"What kind of a gag is this?" said Fred, pushing toward it.

"It's onna wire or sumpin," sputtered the plump gentleman.

Fred also grabbed for it, and his clutch was too much for Irish to withstand. The packet left abruptly, and with a wail of agony, feeling himself instantly under a spell, he charged toward it.

Fred was examining it with some mystification when he felt it buffeted anew. Instinctively he jerked back while Irish screamed at him for his stupidity. But Fred heard nothing. He only knew that there was something going on and that he was concerned about it. He would have retreated in haste had not two men behind him blocked his way. His heels upon their toes brought complaints that made him turn in apology, and in that instant Irish ripped open the packet and, just as he felt himself fading out, snatched forth a single leaf.

GRADUALLY the dizziness passed from him and he hurried forward, the leaf apparently windblown.

Joe and Tawser had finished shutting up the back and Joe was settling himself behind the wheel when Irish sailed up from the walk and plunged through the solid steel to find himself in the semidark at the side of his wicker basket. He was too distrait to make any impression whatever upon the buckles and, after a moment, stopped clawing at them to sink despairingly beside them, gripping the small fragment of rue and hopelessly wondering how he would ever effect a merging once more. Shiveringly, he though about the immediate fate of the six so lately released again into life. He had told everything, and the ghoul should have but very little trouble in finding all of them. And certainly the first thing the ghoul would do would be to relocate his amulet.

"Is he ridin' all right?" growled Joe.

Tawser looked around and beamed upon the basket. "O. K., Joe. Didn't we have a suicide or somethin' to pick up?"

"Yeah, but I think Bugeye went out for it."

Tawser sank down in disappointment and watched the traffic about them. After a little he perked up, studiously regarding a very much upholstered woman in a triple-upholstered limousine. "I wonder," he said, "what we'd do about that."

"About what?"

"That one in there," said Tawser. "By golly, I don't think we got a basket big enough to hold her right arm. It's awful how they keep cuttin' us down on 'quipment."

"Yeah," growled Joe, regarding the fat woman thoughtfully while he paused to await a change of light. She looked frostily back at him through a lorgnette and Joe grunted. "Yeah," growled Joe to Tawser, "that would be a tough one, but j'see the afternoon paper?"

"Sure."

"I mean the front page, not the comic section," growled Joe.

"Oh. What was on the front page?"

"Either somebody is gettin' up a publicity gag for the circus or it's real," growled Joe, "but about umpteen dozen people claim they saw a gent about twenty feet tall. They said forty, but y'always gotta divide it in half."

"No!" said Tawser.

"Yeah," growled Joe. "It'd be just

our luck if he got bumped off on our shift, wouldn't it?"

"Twenty feet tall, huh? Whereabouts was he?"

"Down on First, I think. A bunch of coppers went to look him up."

"That so?" said Tawser. "Maybe they'll have to kill him, huh, Joe?"

"Not for mine," growled Joe.

"Yeah, but thinka the problem," said Tawser. "Why, we'd have to get a truck from the street cleanin' department."

"Yeah, I guess we could do that all right," growled Joe. "But who wants to pull his guts out boostin' around somethin' like that?"

"Borry a crane from the engineers department," said Tawser brightly. "See? Borry a truck and a crane. Say, now, that'd make history, wouldn't it? You said there was a flock of coppers goin' after him? What time?"

"Oh, maybe three. I dunno."

"Stop," said Tawser.

Joe grunted and pulled over to a newsboy who flipped a fold into a paper and handed it up. Immediately afterward he was so buffeted by the crowd that he couldn't give back the two pennies change.

The dead wagon got going again and Tawser studied the headlines, sorting out the European situation from the local political indictments. Finally he found it on the bottom of the page.

"Sure, here it is," said Tawser. " 'Giant Hunt Turns Goose Chase.' Aw, it was a phony. Cops claim everybody was havin' pipe dreams. Now, ain't that too bad, Joe?" He thought about it for a while and then returned to the paper. "Say, it says here that a flock of thefts happened around the town. Statues and things. . . . And look, Joe! A mummy! Princess . . . Princess—An Egyptian, see? Got stolen right out of the Metropolitan! Now what d'ya think of that! Guy must have been goofy, huh, Joe?"

"Huh. Just because a stiff's been laid away a couple thousand years makes him important," growled Joe.

"It's a her."

"Same thing. A stiff's a stiff, ain't it?"

"Yeah, I guess you're right," said Tawser. "He better not come around the morgue, huh, Joe?"

"How coulda mummy walk?" growled Joe.

"I mean the guy that swiped her."

"Oh."

"He better not, huh, Joe?"

They drew up before the morgue's unloading entrance where three or four loafers lounged forward in anticipation. Tawser officiously brushed them aside and undid the doors.

WITH horror, Irish watched them drag out the wicker basket. They bore it inside and he sailed after them They brusquely went through the cataloguing routine while a clerk wrote it all down.

"Who's goin' to take care of it?" said the clerk.

"Dunno," said Tawser.

"It'll have to be the hotel," said the clerk. "We're runnin' off nothin' now and we can't handle every stiff that stumbles in here. The 'propriation won't stand it."

"Well, do we put him onna slab or not?" growled Joe.

"Only thing you can do," said the clerk, the finances of New York weighing very heavily upon his thin shoulders, hired for a few dollars a week. "Take him in."

Joe and Tawser lugged the wicker basket into cold storage and unbuckled the straps. They lifted the body out and draped it on a rectangle of marble, getting down to the serious business of removing the contents of the pockets and then the clothes.

Irish stood by aghast while they stripped him. He writhed when the clerk came in with a tag. The clerk tied

it to the corpse's right big toe.

Tawser took a sheet and spread it over the body, patting it to conform with the shape beneath. He looked at the job with professional satisfaction and was about to comment upon the haul when the clerk bobbed in again.

"Guy dropped three stories over on Sixth. Go get'm."

"Nuts," growled Joe. "Three stories."

"And a bill for a new paving job, too," said the clerk. "They ain't got any sense."

Joe pulled at Tawser's sleeve and they went out, shutting the door behind them.

Irish, finding himself in the awful dark, surrounded by neatly draped forms on marble slabs, shook harder than ever. He had no faintest idea of what he could do; but, nevertheless, he threw the sheet back from the face and violently shook the chilly shoulder. He tried to calm himself and think, but every second he stayed there brought him a step nearer madness. He pulled the sheet up and stepped on the slab as though, somehow, he could put on his body as his body had once put on a coat.

He saw then how naked he was and dropped the sheet hastily into place again.

It came to him abruptly that the longer he stayed here, the greater was his danger, for, inevitably, the ghoul would come to this place. Possibly the ghoul would first look up Machine-gun and get back both the gangster and the amulet and then hurry here to keep watch for Irish.

The wind buffeted him and he tried to hug himself to keep warm. He had convinced himself by now that it was useless to try to get back into his own warm body and useless to keep watch by it.

If he could get to Machine-gun first—

The instant it came to him he sped forth, past the unseeing clerk—so engrossed in finance that he did not note the flying leaf—past the loafers at the door and away across the town, heading for First Avenue.

XIV.

FOR four long hours Irish took his glacial self through the sodden dregs of First Avenue while the elevated rumbled overhead and people hurried hither and thither and joked and laughed and ate and fought and made love and patched up their poverty generally. It made him ache to see them and to know that he was cut off from them as from another planet. Trapped in his freezing aloneness, finding no sign and hearing no tiding of Machine-gun, he began to despair. Sooner or later he would be circumvented by the ghoul, and this time—

If he could only *ask* somebody! But he found that he could hover about a man's head and shriek his questions without the man so much as blinking. And when, as he tried a few times, he shoved his quarry, it left the vicinity in great speed.

He had conned each succeeding edition of the papers for further news about Machine-gun, but it was only repeated that the police department was now very certain that the whole thing was mass hysteria, though they did have to admit that somebody had stolen Atlas.

In quite another part of the paper he found his first clue. At six o'clock, one Jigger McGoon was discovered with a broken back and his eyes gouged out on Bleecker Street. As Jigger had been the heir to a cleaning and dyeing monopoly so lately run by the late Machine-gun Frezoni, it was supposed that there had been some sort of warfare declared in gangdom.

Upon reading this, Irish sped to Bleecker, but all the pushcarts had been put away and, upon the strewn pavement, he couldn't even find a bloodstain to aid him in his hunt.

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Impatiently he picketed a newsstand, waiting for the next edition while the vender, ensconced upon an orange crate and protected from the evening breeze by the El steps, dozed all unwittingly. About ten-thirty the night edition was dumped off at the curb and the vender knelt to slice the string.

Irish wasted no time. From beneath the man's startled nose he filched the first paper and bore it high up and along the street, leaving the vender to mutter about the freakiness of the wind tonight.

In an alley Irish looked for further news and was not long in discovering that Pig-face Tony Golletti had been fished out of the river in a hopeless state of disrepair and that Baboon Ballard had mysteriously appeared on the tracks of the El after the train had passed. Also, it seemed that Dilly Voroni had met an untimely end impaled upon a tombstone in a very personal manner. The papers were beginning to scent a wholesale gang slaughter and were much agitated in consequence.

Wholly apart from all this, a pair of drunks claimed they had seen, at the corner of Eleventh Street and Seventh Avenue, a man as tall as a house. The papers were very much amused by the fact that the cop had ordered them to change brands.

Irish folded the sheets and, scudding past the newsstand, dropped them neatly into the vender's lap, waking him up. The vender growled about El passengers and what they would throw out of a window next and went back to sleep again.

At Eleventh Street and Seventh Avenue, Irish found everything dark and deserted and, once more, was forced to repair to First Avenue in the dim hope that he might encounter Machine-gun.

But he was feeling colder and colder and lower and lower, and when he had taken up his sentry duty once more he vowed that if he did not find Machine-gun by midnight he would then soar

westward and so, at least, get beyond the reach of the ghoul even if it meant being in this state forever.

HOWEVER, quite by accident, he found himself, at five minutes of twelve, across the street from a familiar shop. With sudden elation he remembered Lulu Barnes. By some chance *she* might know of a way for him to recover his desired state.

He wasted no time in entering the place, for it was far easier to walk through the door than to pull the bell. He found himself in the familiar room where the books gathered dust, and the crystal, flyspecks. But it was very dark and it took him a moment or two to find out that he was not the only one there.

A bluish light was burning under a shade, throwing dull blots of light upon the mottled walls and making blurry shadows of three people who sat about the table.

Madame Mystic, in her soiled turban, smelling a little of gin, was gazing fixedly straight in front of her while her callers stared just as fixedly at Madame Mystic. These two were thick-featured Italians, and they evidently wanted to know all about what was in store for them at some future date and so had invested in a séance.

Irish watched for some time, wondering what to do and not helped at all by Madame Mystic's immobility.

"You gotta heem yet?" said the man.

Madame Mystic came to herself irritably. "How do you expect me to find out anything if you keep breaking into my trance? You want to ask George Washington if you should start in the lettuce business, and how'm I gonna find out his answer unless I get hold of George Washington? Now shut up."

"Hm-m-m," said the Italian woman. "Rico, I thinka dis t'ing no use. She'sa da fake. We sitta here fifteen minute, she no gotta da answer. How much you paya her?"

"Two bucks," said Rico.

"That'sa too much. She no giva nothing for da two buck but jabber."

"Aw, shut up," said Lulu Barnes. "I don't have to do this. I don't need your lousy money. I had him on his way and you opened your big yaps and sent him off again. Gwan and go into the lettuce business and lose your shirts. What the hell do I care?" She got up, not offering to take the money from her bosom, and stalked into the hall. It was not money she brought forth, but a pint which she lowered a finger or two —or maybe four.

Rico came tumbling instantly after her. "No, no. I no meana to makea you mad. You tella us. I keepa still."

"Beat it," said Lulu.

"No, looka lady, I no meana what I say. We gotta know."

"All right," said Lulu. "I'll come back and get the dope, but you got to keep your big mouth shut."

"I keepa heem shut," promised Rico.

THEY went back to the table, but the Italian woman was not at all convinced. "Rico, disa woman issa da fake. She robba da two bucks."

"Sssssh!" said Rico. "If she issa da fake, we getta da two bucks back. I takea him out from her skeen!"

"Keep quiet," said Lulu, getting set to do her stuff. She set the automatic slate under the table where she could conveniently write upon it by holding the pencil between her toes. She shut her eyes tight and muttered: "Come to me, O spirits. Come to me and give me a sign. Come to me, George Washington."

Her double-jointed hand twitched ever so slightly and two resounding knocks sprang from nowhere.

"A sign, a sign," she moaned. "Is it you, O spirit of George Washington?"

A single knock came sharply and

Lulu glanced toward Rico with careless contempt. "One knock means yes."

"I see!" said the Italian woman excitedly. "Rico, disa woman issa da fake! She makea da noise with da thumb!"

"Am I that drunk?" blinked Lulu, hastily recovering herself. "But wait. Before you get funny ideas, let's see what the slate says."

She brought it up into the light, and sure enough there was writing upon it. Rico and his wife craned their necks to see it, both valiantly summoning up their recently learned English reading.

"See?" said Lulu, in triumph. "These people better be quiet or else! And look! There's the signature! George Washington!"

"That'sa right," crowed Rico. "She'sa da name all right!"

"Humph," said the woman. "I seea her write that weeth her toe!"

Lulu shook her head sadly and removed the bottle from her stocking, placing it far from her against the wall. "So it's a fake, is it?" she cried in mock indignation, bludgeoning her cloudy wits to turn up yet another trick. "So it's a fake!"

"That'sa right," said the woman. "Rico, you getta da two bucks damn quick!"

But at that juncture a strange thing happened. The slate cloth rose a foot or two and came down over the writing, wiping it completely out. Then the pencil came into action all by itself and wiggled across the dark rectangle, squeaking and scratching.

Lulu Barnes felt her own hair rising.

" 'Get rid of these people. I must talk with you! Irish.' " She read it aloud through frozen lips. "Irish . . . oh . . . it's *him!*"

The two Italians were staring in creepy silence. They exchanged a frightened look and then Rico clutched Madame Mystic's scrawny hand. "We no meana that! Look, you getta da answer, I givea you five bucks!" And he ocularly gave his wife a blow.

"Get out," said Lulu in a hoarse voice. "Get out of here!"

"No, no, no," wailed the woman. "I no seea dose t'ing. I reada da book and she'sa say the knocks and a writing done dissa way, but I know the book she lie. We believea you. Rico, givea da lady da five bucks and aska her nice—"

"Beat it," said Lulu forcefully. "Come back tomorrow, next week, any time. But get out of here now."

"But whatsa mat?" cried Rico. "You getta da message—"

"This . . . this is from a friend. Now leave, for the love of God, leave!" And she bodily thrust them, still protesting, out of the door.

IRRESOLUTE, she gazed around the room. "Irish. Can you hear me? Give me some sign."

Irish picked up the pencil and knocked it once against the slate. And now Lulu, letting a little more light come out of the blue lamp, saw the leaf hovering just over the table. She extended her hand toward it, but Irish jerked it back.

"I won't take it, you poor boy," said Lulu. "It's rue, I can see that. Let me touch it and then I can hear you."

Very cautiously Irish let her contact it. "Go easy. I lost most of this already and, geez, if I lose the rest of it *he'll* get me sure."

Lulu sank into a chair. "You did it, then."

"Sure, but that's too late to help," and, rapidly, he sketched what had happened to him, finishing with: "So they got me laid out like beefsteak and you've got to help me. I can't find Machine-gun and he's got the amulet. And maybe by this time the ghoul has found him and gotten it back."

"But maybe Machine-gun will keep out of the ghoul's way," said Lulu.

"And him weighin' about five tons?" said Irish. "Look. You know all kinds of things. How can I come back to life? You got to tell me!"

Lulu went to her books and for a long time searched through them, and even though she almost filled the room with their dust, at the end of an hour she had no information.

"A flame done in rubies, you say?"

"Surrounded by diamonds."

"That would be the Obi of Eternal Flame," she mused. "Strange. It is listed as lost in the sack of Alexandria."

"It'll be lost again as far as I'm concerned if I don't find Machine-gun."

Lulu was thoughtful for some time, and then she again addressed herself to her books. "Yes," she said finally, "I thought so. According to this excerpt quoted from the 'Book of Hidden Treasures,' the Obi of Eternal Flame is of such power that it burns a separation between soul and body, though it can weld the two in momentary contact."

Irish saw the point and protested wildly. "But the ghoul carried it around with him!"

"Yes, of course," said Lulu gently. "But a ghoul is only a form of apparition and is no soul and body to be scorched apart. He exists only as his whole self, and therein lay his safety. I wish," she said wistfully, "that I had never . . . well . . . come down so very low." She gazed at the bottle against the wall. "My wits are only partly here, and what there are only live again because of my memories with these books and what I once was and what I once could do." She passed a shaky hand across her face, bringing herself back to the subject. "You played with a mighty power and it ultimately killed you. And unless you find your own way out, even your soul shall be destroyed. If I could encourage you truthfully, I would, my poor dear."

"You mean—"

"That your friend Machine-gun, im-

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perfectly fitted as he is, has but very little time to live, and even now—"

"No!" cried Irish. "No! Don't you do it!"

"But it's true, Irish. If he lives until dawn it will be miraculous, and then he would be again a homeless, formless soul, prey to the urgent recall of your ghoul. And he'll take the amulet back with him, for it has no power to stay his going. Search tonight. Look everywhere! I would help you if I could, but you must go!"

XV.

THROUGH the murky small hours, Irish scudded through the darkened town, leaving whirlwinds of dark dust in his passage. But no matter where he searched, no matter how he plunged into back rooms of saloons and through dingy rooming houses of the East Side, he could find no trace whatever of Machine-gun.

Slowly, slowly, the night sounds of the city began to die. Slowly, the dawn sounds of rattling cans and plodding milkmen's horses became more general. And then, with a thick, gray light penetrating through the rearing towers, the city stirred and muttered and rubbed its eyes, wearily facing another day.

And Irish, standing all alone, quivering with both cold and terror, watched the earliest risers stumble down into a subway entrance. He had no will to go on against such odds, for, despite all the places he had looked, there were still a million more. And by now, for all he knew, Machine-gun was again free and Atlas was a cast-off hulk to be found and restored to Radio City.

There was only one thing for him to do, and that was to make a last, valiant attempt to rouse himself in the morgue. And though he well knew the danger he was running, he reluctantly retraced his steps through the gradually brightening day, to come at last to the side entrance.

The loafers were gone and the place where they had stood was wet from the

spray of a passing water cart.

The door stood open and, all unsuspecting, Irish slipped in.

The sight which instantly met his eyes made him shiver all the more, for the place had undergone a great change, and in that change he boded but little good for himself.

The clerk's table was in splinters! The rail about it was smashed. A chair was upset and a file drawer, spilling all its contents, was impaled upon it!

Irish staggered forward. He was so blinded by fear that he did not at first see Joe and Tawser nor even the two men who were so anxiously pommeling them.

Joe was very reluctant in coming around and blinked for quite some time before he knew anything or anyone. Then he took a look at the still recumbent Tawser and stared wildly about the place. Without answering a single question put to him by his relief, he raced out through the door, down the street and around a corner, still going strong.

"Nuts," said the relief. "Dis is nutty! C'mon, Tawser!" And he scrubbed the unconscious little officer's wrists and face so hard that he almost took the skin off.

Finally the other got some water which he flung upon the attendant.

Tawser opened one eye dazedly and started to go off again when the man with the bucket snapped: "What's happened, you dope? What got into this place?"

Tawser muttered: "In white sheet . . . can't steal no bodies . . . around . . . lemme tell ya. Blug—"

IRISH shook worse than ever. He passed through the group and the door and into the storage space beyond. He had forgotten which slab was his and so had to look wildly under several sheets before he was at last forced to the conclusion that he was missing. The vacant slab was too obviously the one upon which his own body had rested, and even the sheet was gone.

Despair welled up within him. Outside the room the two relief attendants were picking Tawser, having become convinced that he needed some patching up.

"Musta been a cyclone," said one.

"Wonder what he was talkin' about that was wrapped in a white sheet."

"Maybe somebody came in an' stole a body, huh? Maybe that was it. Let's get him out of here."

"Hey, you, get out of the way."

Irish spun around to find out who had been so addressed, and if his terror had been great before, that was nothing to what it was now. For there, standing aside for the attendants, was the ghoul!

He saw Irish before Irish could duck. With his eyes flaring satisfaction, he dashed for him.

Irish whisked himself through a row of marble slabs, over which the ghoul had to vault. That left the door open to Irish, for, in terror of losing the leaf, he dared not go through the wall. He understood, as he rushed away, that he had not enough rue and that the ghoul was goaded to madness.

"Stop!" howled the ghoul.

Irish had no such intention. Through the door he rushed, and then through the outer door and into the street. Scudding rapidly along, he discovered that the shrieking wind had doubled its force as though under the ghoul's influence and was now making the going very difficult.

He tried to soar upward and found that the wind grew worse. The ghoul gained on him for the attempt. As fast as he could he hurried north.

Repeatedly glancing around, he discovered at last that the ghoul was carrying a short staff before him from which a thin curl of smoke trailed back, and knew, then, that the ghoul had managed a method of overcoming the

rue, evidently intending to burn it the instant he came within reach.

Irish gripped his fragment of a leaf all the tighter and sped all the faster. Sleepy people, here and there, turned to wonder at the cloaked figure which ran all alone after a flitting leaf. A policeman blinked, thought he might investigate and then gave it up after a few steps.

Block after block Irish put behind him, but the wind made it so difficult that the ghoul was keeping up easily, even gaining a little. First a dozen yards had separated them, but now it dwindled to a scant five and the ghoul's all-yellow orbs were showing confidence in winning.

Irish had no faintest notion, at first, of any destination. But as he continued north he yearned for open country with lots of cover and, more than that, was struck by another thought which determined him upon Central Park if the ghoul did not catch him before he could reach it.

He saw two fives on a street sign and furiously worked them into a five and a six. This he labored into a five and a seven. He could almost sense the heat from the ghoul's flaming stick now and cast back to discover the flying cloak less than eight feet behind him. The wind was growing stronger and colder and he felt his will power fading out.

The street sign gave him a five and a nine and he burst across the wide thoroughfare to plunge into the open of Central Park.

But the ghoul was in no wise hindered. Panting with a foretaste of success, he was making stabs before him with the stick.

IRISH shivered more violently than ever and breasted the bitter gale. Far ahead of him he could see his goal, but he knew now that he would never reach it. He knew that he could not continue more than a few hundred feet without being captured.

To his right he saw a clump of trees. Perhaps there he might find sanctuary. He plunged in its direction, but the change let the ghoul gain once more.

He had almost reached the trees when he dashed through a bush and knew too late his error. The rue was impaled upon a thorn and torn from his grasp and, in snatching at it, he was lost.

The ghoul gripped him, enchained him with a glance.

Panting but beaming cruelly with success, the ghoul looked at him. "The troubler maker," said the ghoul, after a moment. "But, my adventurous friend, whose curiosity knew no satiation, I am not too unkind. I allow you to take one last, fond look about you. Hear the birds in the dawning. Pretty? And see the green trees all cool with dew about you. Look at the grass beneath you and then at the sparkling lake beyond you. Lovely? Look very well, for it is the last time you will see them, the last time you can see anything. The body which enwrapped your soul and protected you from the chill is already gone from you and will soon be buried. And now, all that is left of you is about to vanish from the universe forever. You have earned it ably. You have set my powers at naught. You are too dangerous to be allowed to survive even as a naked, cringing soul. Behold the world about you. You have seen it?"

"Don't!" screamed Irish.

For the stick in the ghoul's hand was flaming with a fire rarely kindled, and that fire was writing his oblivion in its smoke.

The ghoul shook him playfully and pushed the stick at him. He felt himself begin to scorch.

Suddenly the ghoul fell down.

Irish looked incredulously at the prostrate form and then gradually became aware of a towering thing above him.

A massive heel came up and hovered over the form.

The ghoul rolled over and stared up, quaking to see what was over him.

"*Stop!*" he screamed. "Spare me! Spare me! Don't kill me! I am not like you! I am not, I swear it! I have no second life; I shall have nothing if you—"

But Machine-gun—or Atlas—was grinning. The heel came slowly down with a grinding motion, twisting the ghoul about and pressing him into the sod. The stick lay far off where it had been sent. The amulet was gripped in Machine-gun's huge fist. The ghoul, witless in his agony, was driven deeper and deeper into the sod. His screams were punctuated occasionally by the brittle crack of a snapping bone.

Machine-gun stood back for a moment. He swung the amulet by its cord and slapped the ghoul's squashed face. "To smoke!" And there was a puff of sizzling smoke and the hole in the sod was empty.

"I guess," said Machine-gun, "dat dat settles *him*. Now, who was he talkin' to, huh?"

"To me!" cried Irish.

BUT Machine-gun had not heard him at all, and Irish had to pluck the rue from the thorn and push it against the mighty body.

"It's me! Irish! You've got to help me before it's too late."

"There's lotsa time, kid."

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"No, there isn't!" wailed Irish. "That amulet will kill you if you carry it too long!"

"Huh?" said Machine-gun, gazing at the possible offender. "Say, cousin, maybe that's how come I feel like hell."

"It killed me," pleaded Irish. "I lost my rue and went back to the hotel and *he* was waiting for me. And they took my body to the morgue!"

"I *do* feel woozy," said Machine-gun. "And besides, I went and got them doity rats down on Foist and I been dodgin' ever since. Maybe I better change myself around, huh?" And he poised the amulet in the air as though to strike himself.

"Wait!" cried Irish. "Not yet! I've got to find myself first!"

"Oh, sure," said Machine-gun. "I come up here to be Garibaldi, y' see, and I kinda got a single-track head. That Garibaldi would be the nuts, see? You was right, kid. When I seen the senator—I mean Charlie Folham-Price, wot ho!—"

"You saw him?"

"Chure, pal. Where do ya think I hid out last night after I got them doity rats down on Foist? Anywho, I woulda come here and been Garibaldi a lot sooner if the senator hadn't called up your hotel to make sure you was all right. He was worried, see? And they told him you'd been knocked off. And, boy, did I have a hell of a time squeezin' tru dat little door at the morgue! And didn't the guys in there go nuts!"

"*You* went to the morgue?" cried Irish.

"Chure, pal. I hadda get you, didn't I? And I figgered, see, if I got to be Garibaldi I'd go back and get the ghoul with dis amulet. He had it comin', see? An'—"

"Where—" said Irish breathlessly.

"Why, over under dat bush. I wasn't goin' to haul no corpse any farther than I hadda after I was Garibaldi and—"

Irish had dashed to the spot, and there, wrapped up in a sheet, he found his mortal remains intact.

Machine-gun lumbered over to him and shoved the amulet against the cold face.

Irish, rubbing his eyes and then stretching and massaging his tawny hair, sat up. Hastily he pulled the sheet tight about his naked self and grinned sheepishly at Machine-gun.

"Geez," whispered Irish. "Geez, it's so nice an' . . . an' warm!" And then, unashamed, he buried his face in the grass and sobbed for pure joy.

Machine-gun understood perfectly, and so, protected from prying eyes by the trees, sat cumberously down to wait until his pal had got a good grip on himself.

After a while, Irish came around. He sat up and grinned in apology. "It . . . it's so—"

"Chure, pal. I know. Now look, how'm I gonna do dis. Maybe if I blow myself up it won't be so good, huh?"

Irish's agile brain made very short work of it. He made Machine-gun rub himself vigorously with the amulet and, in a very short while, that worthy began to droop. In a space of ten minutes of the exercise, he had done the trick.

The statue of Atlas lay stiffly on the grass, inert and empty and Irish, braving curious eyes, hastened with his charge to Garibaldi. In a few minutes, the celebrated patriot was stretching and yawning and flexing his muscles in his turn and Machine-gun, in very great relief, put out his hand to Irish.

Irish thought he meant to grip and say good-by, but instead he found a wad of bills.

"Dem doity rats down on Foist didn't need 'em no more," said Machine-gun. "An' you look like you need a lot of rest, see?" Irish took the loot and then looked questioningly at the very dangerous amulet.

"Bury it," said Machine-gun. "An' if we ever get rickety, we'll know where to find it, see?"

And so they buried it in a secret place and, shortly after, parted.

XVI.

THREE days later, having slept most of the time under the protection of his very mollified landlady, Irish thought that it was time he presented himself at the Hotel Burton. At least, a very mysterious note he had received told him that he ought to show up there about noon. He had a vision of a contrite Snide who, having learned that he was actually alive, wished to make up for his having starved him to death—but more likely use him for publicity.

And so it was that Irish, all decked out in a resplendent new suit and a snap-brim hat and carrying some pigskin gloves, walked into the hotel lobby.

The place had not changed at all, much to his surprise. The same afternoon crowd was standing about to make impressions upon each other, and Georgie, he heard say the instant he entered, was not at all satisfied that the management would ever know anything about how things were run at the Waldorf.

Snide had been on the lookout for him and came up, briskly rubbing his hands, all ready, it seemed, to consume quantities of shoe polish at a moment's notice.

"Ah . . . Irish, my dear sir. Welcome back! Ah . . . yes . . . and how do you feel? Ah . . . that is marvelous, marvelous! Yes, yes, come right this way. To the manager's office, of course."

They went through the lobby and started up the stairs. Irish was made to wonder quite a little when he saw a new face at the cigar counter. Not feeling quite as happy as before, he allowed Snide to usher him into the twenty-one-carat-chromium manager's suite.

And there Irish received a surprise. A very exotic lady, clothed in very rich furs, rushed forward to give him her hands. And just behind her was a handsome youth known to the society pages as Charlie Folham-Price. And back of these was a very snappily dressed gentleman who bore an astonishing similarity to Garibaldi.

Irish blinked at them. In the first place, they all looked so very polished and at ease that he could not fully connect them with their immediate histories. But they pumped his hands and congratulated him on his recovery and, perhaps because of Snide and the manager, had little to say about such things as ghouls.

When the greetings were done, the manager slavishly pushed forth a piece of paper. "Arrr . . . ahumph, my dear sir," he said, "I . . . er . . . suppose you would like to sign this now and have it all finished."

"Yes, yes!" cried Charlie. "Of course he does!" And he winked warningly at Irish.

Irish looked at the paper and almost fell through the floor. It was a deed to the hotel.

He collected his wits and carried through. He signed in a steady enough hand and blotted the signature quite casually.

"Very . . . ahumph . . . unkind of you to keep back your . . . er . . . delightful connections," said the manager. "Now I suppose we shall—"

"What?" said Irish.

"Why," shuddered the manager, emulated for once in all earnestness by Snide, "won't you be . . . keeping us on?"

"Afraid not," said Irish. "Too many blunders."

"But my wife—" began the manager.

"Come," said Irish, "we'll let the gentleman clean out my desk." And he pulled the trio outside with him and onto the mezzanine. "Hey, geez, what's this all about?"

"Well, pal," said Machine-gun, "it's like this, see? I . . . well . . . aw, hell, senator, you tell'm."

"Our dear friend," said Charlie Folham-Price, "we, that is, the three of us . . . ahum— The guvnor, you know, so delighted to find me so changed and so . . . well, shall we say, expert with bank accounts and such . . . was only too happy to chip in. I'm worth a few hundred thousand a year to him now, instead of being on the red-ink side. Handle the political affairs for him most winningly." He winked and laughed. "So that is the way of it."

"But you?" said Irish, turning to the blindingly lovely woman who was Martha.

"My will was being contested by the three relatives whom I had divided my fortune among," said Martha. "It was a matter of soundness of mind, I think. But they had forgotten a safe-deposit box and dear Katy. And it was no great affair to get the box funds out secretly, and Katy, of course, wanted to clear up my estate, and just yesterday the judges located a will leaving everything to Katy which post-dated the original. Odd, isn't it?" She laughed musically. "And so, I miss this little bit not at all, so think nothing of it."

"And as fer me," said Machine-gun gruffly, "I got me first collections just this mornin', see? An' the territory is all mine from now on. So, if I was you, I wouldn't say nothin', see?"

"Sure, pal," grinned Irish. "But, gosh, I don't deserve—"

"Nonsense, my boy," said Charlie Folham-Price.

"You're a sweet dear. Isn't he, Charlie?" said Martha.

Irish was much affected. So much so, in fact, that when the manager and

Snide came out, carrying their personal papers, he sent them back in again to put them away.

IRISH stirred himself after that. He remembered the new face at the cigar counter and wanted tidings very badly. And so he took them all down into his lobby and started alone toward the new girl.

But he did not have to ask anything, for he almost collided with another person who rushed out of the elevators.

It was Becky!

She took one look at him and threw her arms around him, and when she kissed him Irish was not conscious enough of his surroundings to even see the crowd which instantly collected.

"Irish! You've come back to work! I've talked to Fred and he is going to talk to Snide, and I'll scratch their eyes out if they turn you down! Oh, Irish!"

"Wait a minute," said Irish. I—"

But here he saw Fred, scowling behind the baggage desk. Becky also turned toward him.

"I changed m' mind," said Fred with a snarl. He came swiftly up to them and glared at Becky. "So this is the way you keep a promise, is it? You said you'd go with me only if I got him his job back, and then you grab him and kiss him right in front of everybody. To hell with you and your job, Mr. Irish. You can get out of here before I lose my temper and kick you out!"

Becky, in a Southern hurricane, would have ripped him buttons from stripes if Irish had not caught her in time. Fred, though unrelenting, stepped back to a safe distance.

"Quit it," said Irish. "The . . . the fact of the matter is . . . you see . . . I . . . I own the hotel."

"Nuts," said Fred. "He's come back cuckoo! Listen, you, with all your tall stories and your goofy ideas—"

"Fred!" said Snide severely, coming up. "Fred, how dare you talk that way

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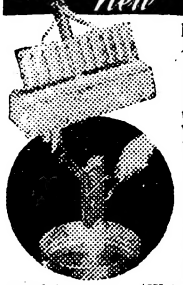

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to the owner of this hotel! Get your things instantly. You're leaving!"

"No, he isn't," said Irish, quietly. "He's going to run the elevator and Bert is going to wear the stripes."

"Me?" cried Bert.

"You," said Irish.

"I quit!" howled Fred.

"Good-by," said Irish.

Becky, for the last few seconds, had been looking at Irish wide-eyed. Now she looked to Snide for confirmation, and suddenly broke into a flood of tears, starting to move away. Irish caught her back again.

"What's wrong?" he said.

"I . . . I c-c-can't now! You . . . you'd think I—"

"Aw, radishes!" said Irish, pulling her near him.

"You . . . you really want me?"

"What do you think?" said Irish. "Come on over and meet my friends."

Doubtfully she accompanied him and curtsied gracefully to the three nice-looking people who were presented to her.

"Very pleased," said Charlie. "Perhaps you'd like to come with us to the Waldorf for dinner?" Georgie, several feet away, blinked and eyed Irish with new respect. "We," continued Charlie, "will probably have to band together to keep our young friend here from prying into—"

"Say!" said Irish suddenly.

They all stared at him to find that his tawny hair was flaming with excitement and his sensitive face quivering with anticipation.

"What's the matter?" said Becky, with a sinking heart.

"That guy registering at the desk," said Irish. "Geez, see that trimmed beard? And that black brief case? And the spats?" He lowered his voice to a whisper and drew them all close to him. "If he ain't a foreign spy, I'll eat his whiskers, and if he hasn't got the plans for airplanes in that valise, I'll eat it, too! You wait here a minute."

THE END.

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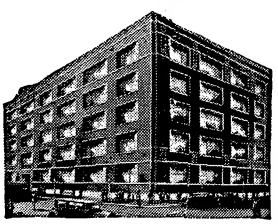

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